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retro GAMER

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INSIDE THE EGRET II MINI

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APPALOOSA DEVELOPERS DIVE INTO THE HISTORY OF AN UNLIKELY HERO

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT GAME DEFINES THE SPECTRUM FOR YOU?

DARRAN JONES

I'm going for the wonderful *Batty*. It's not only an incredible covertape game, but was even better than the arcade game it was based on (*Arkanoid*).
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Elden Ring*
Favourite Game Of All Time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

I had a Commodore 64, so all the converted Spectrum games looked, played and sounded better on that. As I said in the playground at the time, it's just the better computer…
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they leave the service
Currently playing: *Elden Ring*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

The Spectrum has always felt to me like a triumph of engineers and coders making a lot out of a little. That's why *Chase HQ* really stands out, it's still so impressive today.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Blue Reflection: Second Light*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

I never owned a Speccy, or any tape-based computer but I do remember spending hours trying to complete *Narc* with my friends. I've got a rocket launcher but I can also arrest you!
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently playing: *M&B2: Bannerlord…* Modded of course
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War*

MARTYN CARROLL

It has to be *Jetpac*. Playing it aged seven, using a Competition Pro stick, it felt like having an arcade machine at home.
Expertise: *Sinclair stuff*
Currently playing: *Mario Kart 8*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

PAUL ROSE

Knight Lore, because it pushed the hardware further than should've been possible. The little computer that could.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Resident Evil* on the Game.com (no, really!)
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

ANDREW FISHER

Jetpac – it's absolutely superb fun and crammed into 16K, proving how Ultimate mastered the hardware.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Knightmare*
Favourite game of all time: *Paradroid*

IAIN LEE

When I think of the Spectrum, I always think of the *Ghostbusters* game. Partly because I once broke into a friend's house, which I thought was empty, to play it. Turns out it wasn't actually empty…
Expertise: Buying overpriced stuff on eBay then never touching it.
Currently playing: *Jackbox Party*
Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

RORY MILNE

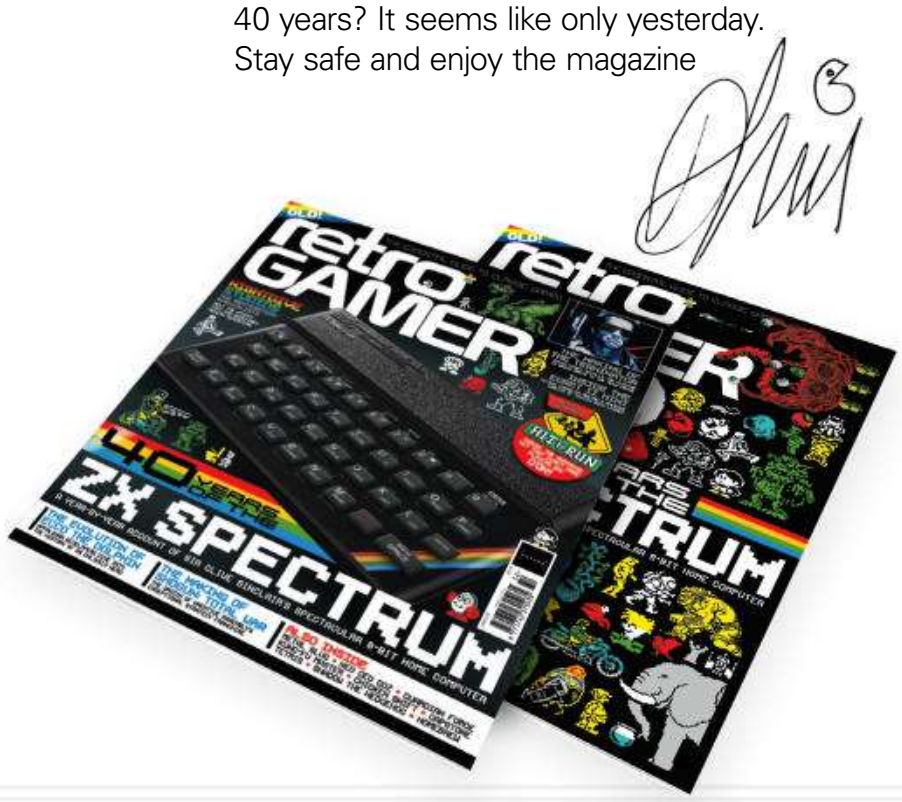
It was succeeded by technically better games, but *Knight Lore* hit a sweet spot for me, where interest in the Spectrum peaked and isometric seemed like magic to those who owned one.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Driver*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

LOADING...

When I first started editing Retro Gamer back in 2005 there was only one system we considered putting on the cover – the ZX Spectrum. Everyone involved on the new version of the magazine had been touched by the machine in some way, so it's great to see it back on the cover, some 17 years later.

While I wouldn't own a Spectrum until Amstrad's +2 model came out, Sir Clive Sinclair's machine still had a big impact on my early gaming life. Friends like Paul Elkins, Richard Talboys and Martin Vincent all had a Spectrum, so I was always able to experience many of the latest games, from *Manic Miner* and *Sabre Wulf* to *Elite* and *Chuckie Egg*.

The Spectrum felt like a huge step up from Paul's ZX80 (it had colour graphics for a start) and I've lost count of the hours I must have spent jockeying for control of the joystick (we'd share lives on games like *Sabre Wulf*), typing up type-in listings and getting stuck in text adventures. The system felt revolutionary and indeed it was (as we've mentioned many times since the magazine's inception) and it really felt like you were experiencing something special, something new. So now, some 40 years after we first experienced Sir Clive's 8-bit wonder, it's the perfect time to revisit the pivotal years that defined its creation. 40 years? It seems like only yesterday. Stay safe and enjoy the magazine



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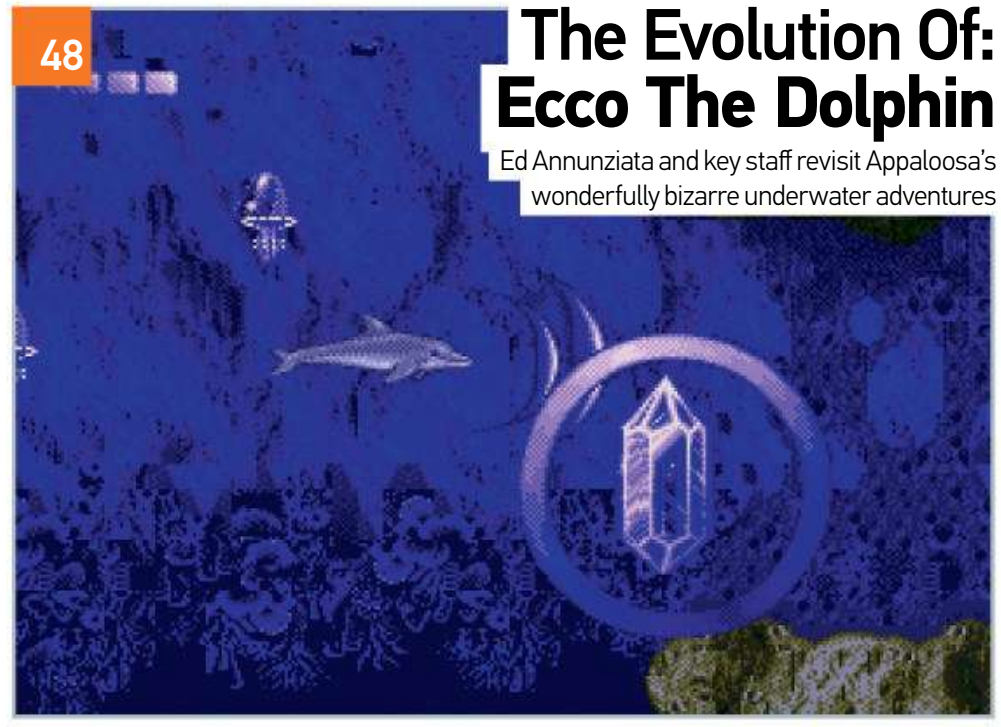
40 Years Of The ZX Spectrum

Martyn Carroll and Graeme Mason are your guides as we look back at all the key years of Sir Clive Sinclair's popular home micro



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The Evolution Of: Ecco The Dolphin

Ed Annunziata and key staff revisit Appaloosa's wonderfully bizarre underwater adventures

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BITMAP BEATS

Bitmap Bureau turns to beat-'em-ups with Final Vendetta

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Paul feels like everyone could do with some cheering up so he's listed five essential games to raise your mood

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14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
It's July 2005 and news of new consoles is everywhere. Nick decides to investigate

Fans of retro and retro-inspired games may well already have their eyes on Bitmap Bureau – in recent years, it has worked on games including *Battle Axe* and *Xeno Crisis*. The developer has now announced its latest project, *Final Vendetta*, so we spoke to Bitmap Bureau's design director Mike Tucker to find out about it. "As a kid, going back to when I was about 12, *Final Fight* was all the rage back then. Before that, we had *Double Dragon* of course, we had some UK efforts as well like *Target: Renegade*. So yeah, during the Eighties and Nineties, beat-'em-ups, action movies – as a teenager, they were all the rage. So I'd always wanted to make a beat-'em-up," he explains. "I might have done it sooner, but we needed to find an artist who could pull off the crazy amount of sprite animations we needed. It took that long for us to find someone who had the skill and the work rate, and the dedication."

The team had worked on the Neo Geo hardware before, and it felt to Mike like a natural home for the game. "With the Neo Geo, we felt like there weren't many good beat-'em-ups on it at all. There's lots of great versus beat-'em-ups like *The King Of Fighters*, *Last Blade*, *Fatal Fury*. But in terms of actual brawlers you've got *Burning Fight*, which is a very poor man's *Final Fight* clone. *Mutation Nation*, which is OK. *Sengoku 1-3*, which are OK. But it just felt like there wasn't anything up to the standard of *Final Fight* or *Streets Of Rage*. So yeah, we thought we'd fill that hole with what we think is a great beat-'em-up. It made sense to also bring it to modern platforms."

This brand-new beat-'em-up sees martial artist Claire Sparks battling through London to rescue her sister, aided by brawler Duke Sancho and the hulking former pro wrestler Miller T Williams. There are four game modes,

» Bitmap Bureau's Mike Tucker is a big fan of side-scrolling beat-'em-ups and has big plans for the genre.

» [PC] If it weren't for the pixels, we'd think this was a regular Saturday night on the Central line.

with the main one being an Arcade mode that takes place across six stages, each with their own sub-areas. Versus mode is very much like similar options in the *Streets Of Rage* games or the B mode of NES *Double Dragon*, allowing two players to face off against one another. A Survival mode will pit players against increasingly difficult waves of enemies, and lastly there's a Boss Rush mode.

The game includes music by Featurecast, which was the result of a happy coincidence as the Bitmap Bureau team happens to work next door to his wife. "He was always curious as to what we were doing, and then we heard he was a top DJ and producer. At the start of *Final Vendetta* we just thought, 'Yeah, we've got to make use of this guy's skill,' which is writing incredible dance music – techno, drum and bass, basically he can do it all. It's just a perfect fit," Mike explains. "And it also turned out he was friends with Utah Saints. He had worked with them, they've worked on a few games in the past, so they knew what the process was. It was quite easy to get them involved, they're very keen and it doesn't get much more Nineties than getting Utah Saints working on the soundtrack."

Although *Final Vendetta* has a distinctive retro style and will be releasing on classic hardware, it isn't a simple retread of past efforts. From what we've seen of the game so far, there are plenty of uncommon moves to be seen, including the ability to attack foes while they're down and multiplayer throw combos. "You'll see the influences from a lot of games, but we've also added our own touches," says Mike. "There are quite a few moves and techniques in there that you wouldn't normally see. The main one is the block button, which is very unusual for a beat-'em-up. We've tried to make it feel like a thinking man's

» [PC] Sometimes you've just got to do some amateur panel beating in exchange for bonus points.

» [PC] We respect Tigre Club's proper health and safety precautions – look at that wet floor sign!

» [PC] Miller drops the elbow on a downed foe while Claire raids a phone box for goodies.

brawler – rather than bombard the player with loads of enemies and put them in these unrealistic situations, we've tried to move it a bit closer to *Street Fighter* in terms of how you have to think quite carefully about how you tackle each enemy."

Numskull Games will be releasing *Final Vendetta* in May for PC, Switch, PS4, PS5, Xbox One and Xbox Series S/X. Later in 2022, Bitmap Bureau will release Neo Geo MVS and AES versions. The developer is also considering other retro formats, some of which it has released on before and some new, but while none are confirmed there are some that Mike can rule out. "The issue with *Final Vendetta* is that it just has so much in the way of animation and pixel art, to get it on to say the Mega Drive is just not going to happen," he tells us. "Neo Geo CD won't handle the amount of animation. Having loading times mid-level, it'd just be painful I think, so it's going to be cartridge only."

Time will tell if the game will come to your favourite format, but it looks like it will be plenty of fun on the ones it's coming to – we'll look to bring you a review in the near future.

> "You'll see the influences from a lot of games"
> **MIKE TUCKER**

» [PC] Of course, there will be a variety of bosses to challenge for your pugilistic pleasure.

TURTLE POWER

Konami has recently announced *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Cowabunga Collection*, a physical and digital compilation comprising 13 games starring the pizza-loving heroes. Digital Eclipse is handling development, and the compilation will cover arcade, NES, SNES, Game Boy and Mega Drive games, with online play added to certain games. Konami is also promising the inclusion of Japanese versions of games, plus bonus development art, sketches and game design material. The collection has been confirmed for PC, Switch, PS4, PS5, Xbox One and Xbox Series S/X, with a price of £34.99 announced but only a vague date of 2022 confirmed.

STATUE SURPRISES

Numskull has announced a range of limited-edition statues featuring classic gaming characters recently, for those of you who love merchandise. *Resident Evil* fans will get a kick out of the Tyrant, who stands 11 inches tall and looks as aggressive as you'd expect, or if you prefer *Resident Evil 2*, there's a Licker statue standing just over six inches tall with all the gory details. *Shenmue* fans can get Ryo Hazuki, ready for action atop broken bar furniture. For more information on these statues, including pricing and details of retailers stocking them, visit www.numskull.com

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Let's do the time warp again

I wrote a few months ago about how arcades aren't arcades any more. Instead, they are these huge ticket-printing palaces that invite you to keep popping the coins in (or waving your debit card) so you can get about 15 tokens. If you can get a decent number of tokens, say about 40,000, you can win a jar of fart putty. Fab you might think, except fart putty in the shops costs around a quid. The amount you spend on 40,000 tickets is enough to buy a small flat in Norwich.

It has been brought to my attention that there are several old-fashioned arcades across the country, packed to the rafters with proper games and not one of them gives you the opportunity to win a ticket or a packet of Refreshers. No, these places focus on the fun of rocking up to a cab, having a pop and then seeing if you can beat your last score. Who knows, maybe you get to put three letters into the hall of fame.

Just take a second to remember the thrill of putting ILR (Iain Lee Rougvie) or your own initials in there. That was pretty cool, right? You'd stare at it, go off to play another machine and then come back to see if you were still sixth. Who knows, maybe you were a naughty kid who tried to put a three letter version of the F-word in. I won't type those three letters for fear of a youngster reading this, but you all know what I'm wanging on about.

The beauty of these new old-fashioned arcades is you don't need 10-pence pieces or even pound coins. You pay an entrance fee and ALL THE MACHINES ARE FREE TO PLAY. This sounds like an awful business model to me, but also the most exciting thing ever. I haven't been to any yet, but I'm looking at The Pixel Bunker in Milton Keynes and Heart Of Gaming in Croydon. But you have a look. There are loads all over the country. Now, you're probably reading this and going, "Yes, mate. We know. We read **Retro Gamer** and we expect more from our columnists." Well, I'm sorry. I do tend to be a little slow about things, please forgive me.

I'm meeting with a friend of mine, David Turners from The Computer Game Show pod, and we are bringing our kids along – 8, 10 and 12 – I know, weird names, right? (And I also know that is someone else's joke.) My boys are retro savvy enough to dig this, I think. They're certainly very excited about it. It's also a chance to show off to them. They do get a buzz watching me play *Pac-Man* and they think I'm pretty cool at it. The last time they admired me so much was when I jumped 200 feet off a balsa wood aeroplane on *I'm A Celebrity.*

I'll let you know how it goes. I'm expecting it to be a pretty magic day out and a chance to show my kids my history. It would also be great if I could get the F-word on a hall of fame.

> "The amount you spend on 40,000 tickets is enough to buy a small flat in Norwich"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Happy games, happy thoughts

Happy! That's what the world needs right now. Things have been bleak long enough. We need the escapism that only videogames can offer. But wait! Videogames are often full of dark, austere, awfulness. I want to play games that make me feel happy, so here are five that are guaranteed to pump sunshine directly into your heart.

■ *Out Run* is one of the most hopeful games of all time. The infinite freedom of the open road, your favourite song on the radio... blue skies, epic sunsets, rolling waves... your significant other at your side... has any other game ever peddled dopamine in such quantities?

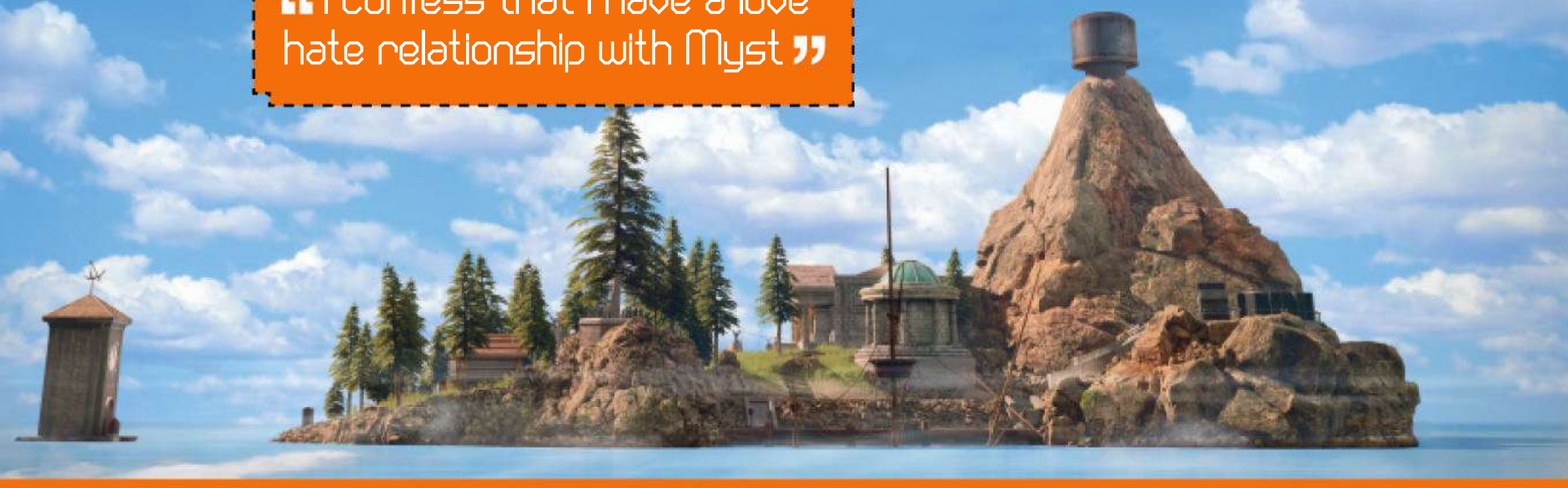
■ Ask an Amiga owner what the happiest moment of their life was, and they'll probably reply that it's all of *Rainbow Islands*. Admittedly I'm more of a *The New Zealand Story* man – it's got a cute kiwi wearing trainers! – but it's hard to argue with a game in which literal rainbows gush forth from your crotch. The world would be a better place if we could all do that. I don't recommend that you try it, though.

■ *Donkey Konga*! Oh man. It's just a ridiculous game, full of that trademark Nintendo whimsy – not to mention trademark tunes – which as you're no doubt aware came with its own set of conga drums. Short of a beat-'em-up, few genres can get you to focus like a rhythm action game, but *Donkey Konga* offers the added tactile benefit of hitting something that isn't a face. Live out your Giovanni Hidalgo fantasies! I don't actually know who that is, but I did a search for conga players and his was the first name to come up.

■ Sticking with Nintendo, you could pick pretty much any game from the *Mario* series and you'd be guaranteed to crack a smile (*Super Mario Sunshine* seems an obvious example). However, it's *Yoshi's Island* which would be my go-to escapist platformer, just because it's so damned cute. You collect flowers and grinning stars, and even the iconic *Mario* bad guys are somehow given a less-threatening makeover. It's a procession of brilliant ideas, each more sillier and more inventive than the last. Heck, I'm going to say it now – and I don't even care if you burn me at the stake for it – I think it's a much better game than *Super Mario World*.

■ I confess that I have a love-hate relationship with *Myst* (alright, it's more like a hate-hate relationship), but there's no denying that there's something otherworldly about it. Literally. Age, however, has perhaps only improved the sense of it being an artefact from elsewhere or when. Its flipbook navigation has dated horribly, yet it was so far ahead of its time that it now resides in a strange sort of... netherspace, a kind of gameplay uncanny valley. Time has been kind to its influence though; playing it today, you can see that it has had an impact on everything from escape rooms to immersive theatre. If you want to lose yourself for a while, and break free from the misery of the modern world, *Myst* might just be the ultimate escape.

> "I confess that I have a love-hate relationship with Myst"



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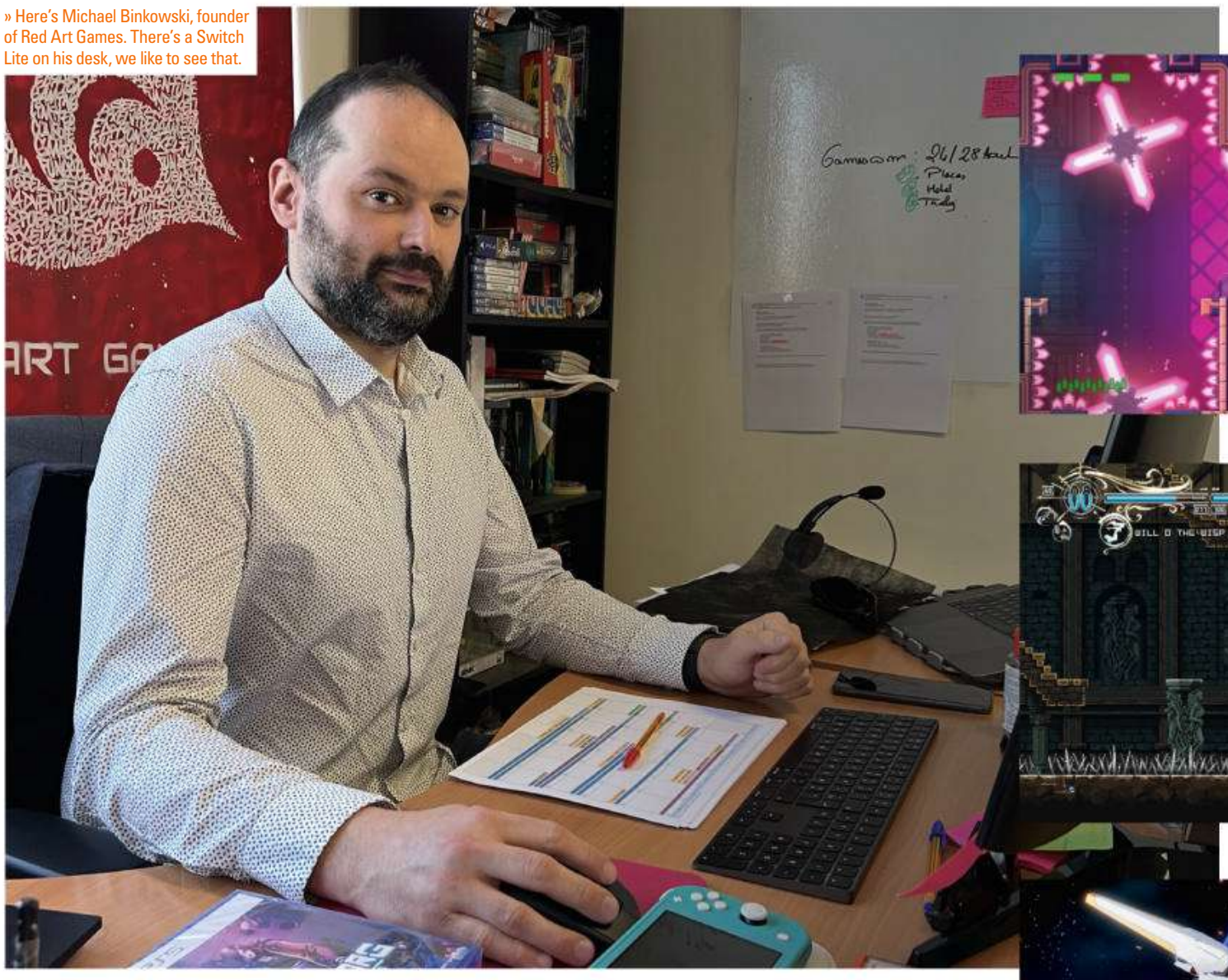


» Here's Michael Binkowski, founder of Red Art Games. There's a Switch Lite on his desk, we like to see that.

» [Switch] If you want to know what we thought of *Gunborg*, head for the reviews section in this very issue.

» [Switch] *Record Of Lodoss War: Deedlit In Wonder Labyrinth* is part of a multimedia franchise with roots in the Eighties.

» [PS4] *Relayer* is an upcoming physical release from Red Art Games, a strategy RPG game with big mech battles.

Red Art Games

This publisher of indie games has a passion for pixel art and a penchant for physical products

Here at Retro Gamer, we're always interested in any publisher that makes a specific goal of supporting physical games in the modern market, but Red Art Games doesn't just turn digital indie games into tangible products. As well as having a strong tendency to pick up retro-inspired games like *Gunborg: Dark Matters* and *Horned Knight*, the publisher has been picking up games with legacies of their own such as *Record Of Lodoss War: Deedlit In Wonder Labyrinth*. To find out more about the company and the philosophy that guides it, we spoke to founder Michael Binkowski.

What's your background in videogames – what were your first games and systems?
I fell in love with videogames at a very young age when I discovered the Sega Master System. I have very fond memories of games like *Alex Kidd*, *Hang-On* and *Rastan*. And then I naturally switched over to the Mega Drive and never stopped playing. I kept on going with the PlayStation, Saturn, Dreamcast and so on. I have always played a bit of everything, from mainstream titles like *Final Fantasy VII* or *Gran Turismo* to more obscure games like *Hokuto No Ken: Seiki Matsu Kyuseishu Densetsu* on the PlayStation or *Tokyo Bus Guide* on the PS2.

When and why did you decide to start publishing games?
I created Red Art Games at the very end of 2017. Before that, I co-created and ran a famous Parisian videogames store for 15 years. During the last few years of my time there, more and more customers were asking me if such and such titles were getting a physical release, so I thought that there was demand for boxed versions of smaller titles. We believe in physical media for a variety of reasons and it is also great to be able to give independent creators and small studios the opportunity to release their games physically on consoles.

Plenty of Red Art games have a retro look to them – is that something you actively look for, or is it just reflective of the kind of indie games being made today?
This indeed is something that I actively look for as that style reminds me of the 16-bit era of videogames. There are exceptions to that rule of course as we also publish more modern-looking titles and even 3D titles. But we do look for that style. Every member of Red Art Games loves pixel art and the whole team keeps a look out for games that could fit in our portfolio.

Is there any particular era of gaming that you favour?
I am a huge fan of the Super Nintendo, Mega Drive and Neo Geo era. This was the golden era of videogames as far as I'm concerned. The games were so beautifully made and creative. And this was pre-internet so you really discovered everything about a game when you put it in your console for the first time. We are in the social media era now, so much information about games is shared nowadays. People

» [PS4] Red Art Games has plenty more to offer in the retro style – here's *Batbarian: Testament Of The Primordials*.

see half the story of a game on YouTube before it even comes out. I'm exaggerating a bit, but there is some truth to that.

Like many publishers of physical games, you do some releases with limited production runs, and others as open preorders. What are the benefits and drawbacks of these approaches?
Well, the limited production runs are harder to set. You don't want to manufacture too many copies but at the same time, you don't want to disappoint people who didn't get to buy the games they wanted. The limited releases also tend to draw the attention of scalpers, and they have a tendency to ruin the fun for everybody. As for the open preorders, I can't think of any major drawback.

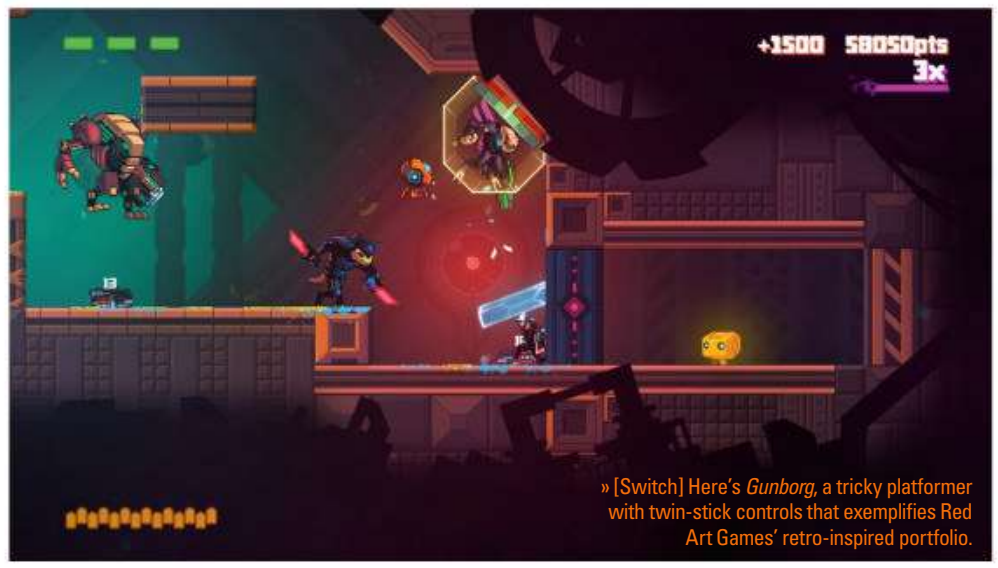
***Record Of Lodoss War: Deedlit In Wonder Labyrinth* is part of a long-running series. Had you played any of the previous games before signing this one up?**
Yes I had. I spent a lot of time playing *Record Of Lodoss War* on the Dreamcast. It was a very good game in my opinion. I also played the Mega-CD game for a little bit, but as it was only released in Japan and is in Japanese only, it wasn't as easy to play.

Although *Record Of Lodoss War* has that heritage, we understand that it doesn't require prior knowledge of the *Lodoss* world to play. Is that right?
That is totally right. *Deedlit In Wonder Labyrinth* is a beautifully made Metroidvania that can be enjoyed on its own. Fans of *Record Of Lodoss War* will of course enjoy the references to that universe. But there is no need to have prior knowledge of the story to get into this new adaptation.

***Gunborg* doesn't have the same kind of extensive history, but we felt that there's a European retro gaming feel to it. Is there anything in specific that it reminds you of?**
Gunborg: Dark Matters' combination of platforming and action reminds me of games like the 2D *Mega Man* games or titles like *Skyblazer* and *Hagane*, which of course weren't European. Rickard Paulsson, Gunborg's designer, has said that he was mostly influenced by neo-retro games like *Hotline Miami* and *Super Meat Boy*.

The forthcoming collector's edition for *Arietta Of Spirits* comes in a special box inspired by Super Nintendo games. Is that the kind of thing we should expect to see more of?
Absolutely. We have a lot of things currently in the works and you can expect more special boxes like *Arietta Of Spirits*. I can't go into specifics right now but those special editions won't be inspired by the old-school boxes of just one console maker…

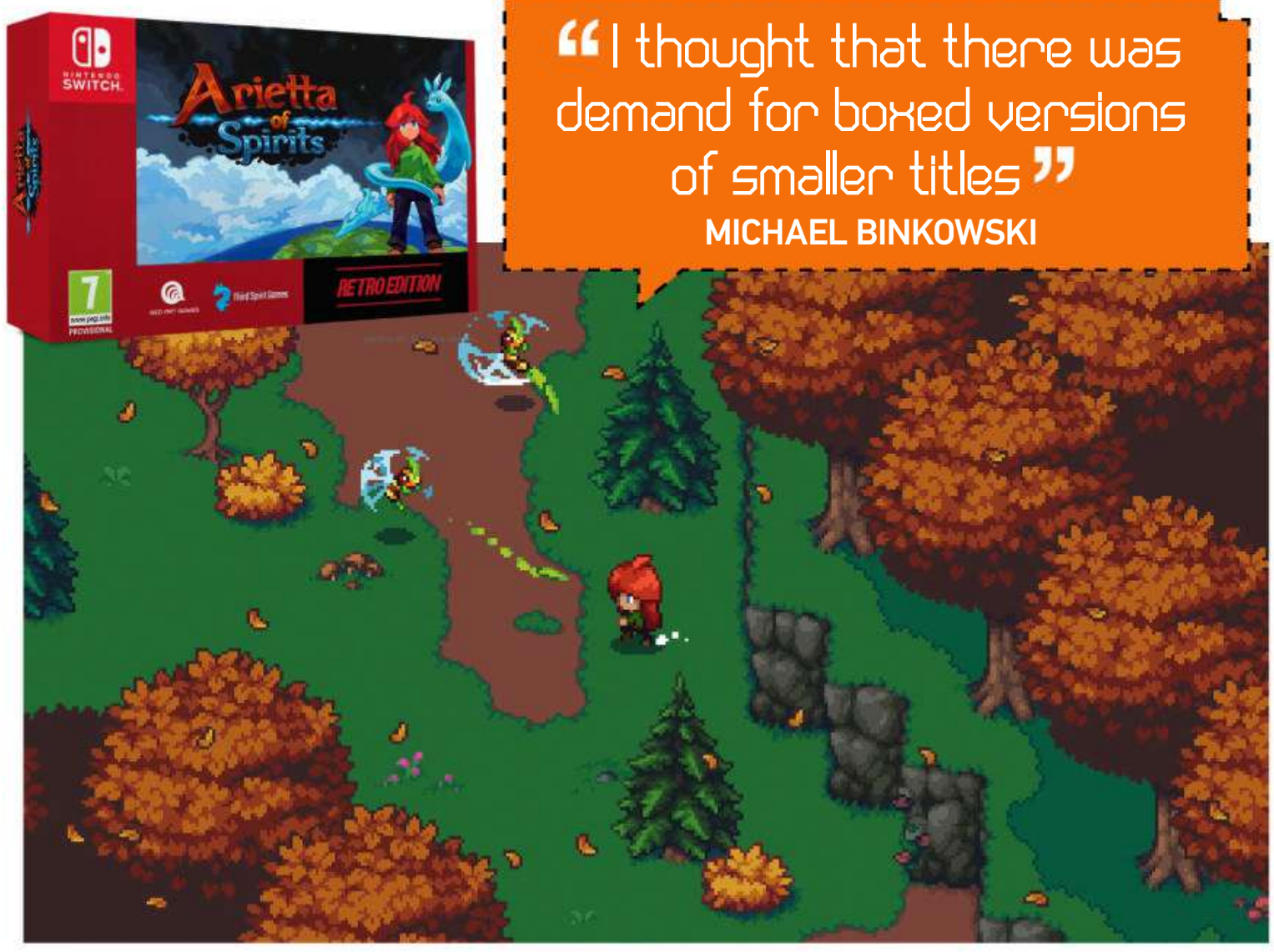
What are your future plans for Red Art Games?
We are going to continue working with indie developers and publishers to offer physical versions of their digital games. Late last year, we started releasing North American versions of some of our games and we are going to keep doing so. We will be releasing physical versions of the Japanese RPG *Relayer* in both Europe and North America in late May. At the end of last year we also opened Red Art Studios, our own development studio. We create console ports of PC indie titles and we plan on making our own games in the near future.



» [Switch] Here's *Gunborg*, a tricky platformer with twin-stick controls that exemplifies Red Art Games' retro-inspired portfolio.

» [Switch] This is certainly a perilous-looking place. How will Deedlit get back from crossing the lava?

» It looks like a SNES game, doesn't it? But the cartridge won't fit in your SNES. It's for your Switch.



> "I thought that there was demand for boxed versions of smaller titles"
> **MICHAEL BINKOWSKI**

» [PC] *Arietta Of Spirits* is a top-down game, with reminds us of *Secret Of Mana* on the SNES.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

JULY 2005 – E3 is always at its most exciting during the dawn of a new generation, and this year both Sony and Nintendo have brand-new machines to show off. The gloves are off now, and Nick Thorpe is ringside to see how the world reacts

NEWS JULY 2005

On 1 July, American singer Luther Vandross passed away at the age of 54, following complications from a heart attack. This followed a major stroke in 2003, which had affected his singing and mobility. During his career, hits including *Here And Now* and *The Power Of Love* earned Vandross 11 consecutive platinum albums.

Islamist terrorists carried out a co-ordinated series of suicide bombings in London on 7 July, killing 52 people and injuring more than 700 others. The first three attacks took place within a minute of one another on the London Underground, two on the Circle line and one on the Piccadilly line. The fourth took place on a bus at Tavistock Square approximately an hour later. Three of the bombers had been born and raised in Britain and had lived in Leeds, the fourth was a Jamaican born convert residing in Aylesbury. All four attempted perpetrators were found guilty of conspiracy to murder in 2007 and received life sentences.

Former prime minister Edward Heath passed away on 17 July at the age of 89. Elected MP for Bexley in 1950, Heath rapidly ascended to the ministerial ranks before becoming Conservative leader in 1965. Heath defeated Labour in the 1970 election, but an inflationary crisis and strikes saw Wilson regain power in 1974. Heath remained an MP until 2001, and was a noted thorn in the side of his successor Margaret Thatcher.

What was wrong with the old DualShock controller design? That's what we want to know.

Edge thinks the Revolution "un-Nintendo-like" in its design. It's certainly different from the GameCube's toy box aesthetic.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 2005

With the Xbox 360 already announced, all eyes were on Sony at E3. "Everyone, not just internet games journalists, appears to have fallen head over heels in love with the PlayStation 3," reported *Edge*. It felt that "Epic's Unreal Engine 3 Demo was an illustration that PS3 isn't going to be quite the awkward beast PS2 proved to be", and that a demo showing a 3D model of Alfred Molina was "almost indistinguishable from the real thing at a quick glance". Overall, it assessed the presentation as a "remarkably robust show of strength from the industry leader". By contrast, *games™* offered a more sober and sceptical assessment. "Real-time renderings of the opening scene from *Final Fantasy VII* and a mud-splattered section of *Motorsport* were certainly eye-catching," the magazine reported. "Even so, those of us who were there were reminded of the presentation of the PS2 some seven years ago, when much was promised and then not delivered."

The magazine also noted something worrying about Sony's foray into handheld gaming. "Sony was clearly so busy that it all but forgot the future of the PlayStation Portable. Plenty of games were on the show floor but no mention was made of any plans for online play, web browsing or downloadable content; a disappointment, to say the least."

Surprisingly, Nintendo had two new consoles to show off. The Game Boy Micro was unexpectedly unveiled as the latest evolution of the Game Boy Advance range, a truly tiny system with a very high-quality LCD screen and customisable faceplates. However, the headlines were reserved for the Revolution. A prototype design was revealed, and Nintendo mentioned many of its capabilities – it could play DVDs and connect wirelessly to the internet, it would be backwards compatible with the GameCube, and downloadable versions of past Nintendo classics would be available. However, the company

[PS3] Edge felt that Motorstorm's E3 showing "looks suspiciously pre-rendered." We're sure it'll look just like this.

[PC] The lack of a subscription fee in *Guild Wars* proved extremely popular with gamers.

For now at least, the Game Boy Micro reaffirms Nintendo's commitment to traditional single-screen handhelds.

[Xbox] With more graphical power at its disposal, Rare finally achieved peak fluffiness for *Conker*.

kept its hand close to its chest in other regards. "One thing we're itching to know is how Revolution will compare to the other machines in terms of technical capability," said *NGC* in its analysis of the console. "And what we really want is a glimpse of its controller – just a half-second peek would be fine." Nintendo also unveiled details of its online services for the Nintendo DS, with *Mario Kart DS* launching with online play by the end of the year.

Microsoft had the most muted showing at E3, with *Edge* reporting that it had "little left in the pot" as its console had already been revealed. "One thing that did surprise was confirmation that the console would be backwards compatible with the Xbox, but even this isn't definite," *games™* reported. "Chief Xbox officer Robbie Bach left much to the imagination by saying that the 'best-selling' Xbox titles would be compatible, suggesting that compatibility depends on the games you want to play." *Edge* reported that, "It hasn't got the software support to match up to that on offer at Sony's event: a nonetheless pretty sequence from *Dead Or Alive 4* goes on for too long, a *Kameo* demo looks cute enough but isn't particularly smooth." On this point, *games™* was more upbeat. "True, it might be a little heavy on the Western content for some […] as well as being rather sequel orientated, but the feedback for games like *Gears Of War*, *Condemned* and *Kameo* was, for the most part, hugely positive."

There were plenty of major game announcements, too. Prospective Xbox 360 owners could look forward to *Dead Rising*, *Saint's Row*, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 3* and *The Outfit*, while *Half-Life 2* and *Far Cry Instincts* were shown off for the original Xbox. Plenty of PS2 games were on show, including *Shadow Of The Colossus*, *Okami*, *Guitar Hero* and *Soulcalibur III*, while the PSP got *Pursuit Force*, *Burnout Legends*, *Daxter* and *Ratchet: Deadlocked*. The new GameCube *Zelda* was named as *Twilight Princess*, with *Chibi Robo* and *Pokémon XD* also shown. The DS was set to receive *New Super Mario Bros*, *Sonic Rush*, *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* and *Animal Crossing*. Over on the PC, the long-delayed *Prey* and *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* were shown.

That's a lot of talk about the future, but what of the present? PC owners could enjoy *Guild Wars*, an MMORPG with no subscription fee. It scored 8/10 in *games™* and 86% in *PC Gamer*. On the Xbox, Rare's remake *Conker: Live & Reloaded* won critics over. *XBM* scored the filthy remake 8/10 as it "works well as both a platform adventure and a multiplayer fragfest", while *Official Xbox Magazine* felt that the developer had finally delivered "a game worthy of its pedigree" and gave it 9.0/10. Finally, GameCube owners could enjoy more bongo-slapping fun in *Donkey Konga 2* (88% *NGC*, 8.0/10 *Cube*).

What will happen next? More Revolution information, or an explanation for the bizarre new PlayStation 3 controller? Join us next month to find out.

CHARTS

JULY 2005

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith (LucasArts)
2 – Championship Manager 5 (Eidos)
3 – FIFA Street (EA)
4 – Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition (Rockstar)
5 – Gran Turismo 4 (Sony)

XBOX

1 – Forza Motorsport (Microsoft)
2 – Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith (LucasArts)
3 – Championship Manager 5 (Eidos)
4 – Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition (Rockstar)
5 – Lego Star Wars (Eidos)

GAMECUBE

1 – Mario Party 6 (Nintendo)
2 – Resident Evil 4 (Capcom)
3 – Metroid Prime 2: Echoes (Nintendo)
4 – Baten Kaitos (Nintendo)
5 – FIFA Street (EA)

MUSIC

1 – Ghetto Gospel (2Pac feat. Elton John)
2 – We Belong Together (Mariah Carey)
3 – You're Beautiful (James Blunt)
4 – Crazy Chick (Charlotte Church)
5 – Since U Been Gone (Kelly Clarkson)

THIS MONTH IN...

NGC

Nobody knows much about the Revolution, with the only information being that IBM's 'Hollywood' CPU and ATI's 'Broadway' GPU power the system. "We'd be surprised if the finished console doesn't have a similar spec to its rivals, but anything could happen," says *NGC*. Surely Nintendo wouldn't launch something less powerful?

Play

The PSP "could well be the reason the word 'portable' was invented", says *Play*. "It's also the reason for many other things, which we will now list: Aaron's envy of Jones; why Jones now owns *Spider-Man 2*; why iPods are, like, sooo 2004; some worrying dreams; why we're friends with Darran Jones." Hopefully Aaron now has a PSP of his own.

Official Xbox Magazine

What does the future hold for Microsoft's first console? "The original Xbox hasn't been downgraded to a mere autopsy specimen suitable only for strengthening the Xbox 360's future, it's a strong console capable of running with fresh new titles well into 2006 at the very least," says *OXM*.

PLAYER I
LIVES

TERMITES

TERMITE

TERMITES

PLAYER I 005530

Chicken Shift

CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN A HEN HOUSE

» RETROREVIVAL

» ARCADE » 1984 » BALLY SENTE

Sente seemed like the perfect set up. It began life as Videa, founded by three former Atari employees, aiming to 'do an Activision' and become third-party developers, for the arcade business rather than the home market, selling its titles to whichever coin-op manufacturer offered the most money… and becoming filthy rich in the process. The trio had impressive credentials: Ed Rotberg had programmed *Battlezone*, Roger Hector was an accomplished graphic artist and Howard Delman had *Asteroids*, *Lunar Lander* and many other hits on his CV.

Then in 1983, Videa was acquired by Atari founder and industry legend Nolan Bushnell, who brought a wealth of experience, shed-loads of cash and a game-changing idea. Literally. His proposed Sente System would allow operators to easily swap game ROMs in and out of generic machines, reducing the need for costly bespoke cabinets – essentially what the JAMMA standard would introduce to the arcade business several years later. Even when Nolan's pizza empire imploded and he was forced to sell, Bally stepped in, a company with a proven track record in the coin-op business, and it continued to attract more ex-Atarians to the venture, including Dennis Koble of *Sprint* fame and the creator of *Major Havoc*, Owen Rubin.

Yet with all this talent and industry experience, Bally Sente never produced a game that could match the commercial or critical success of the Atari titles the team had produced just a few years before. I cheekily asked Ed Rotberg if he had an explanation. "It's a good question and one I can't really answer," he sighed. "Sometimes games that look good on paper just don't turn out to be any fun."

Chicken Shift can't have looked good on paper. Guiding eggs down pipes to fill a basket hardly sounds as exciting as saving the world from alien invasion. Then there's a strange proto-*Lemmings* screen where you use lifts and barriers to direct walking eggshells to freedom before a bizarre chick-flicking finale. And yet it's huge fun. It has a Game & Watch feel to it – a fixed screen, a simple premise, just two buttons for the controls and the rising stress levels as your eyes dart from one crisis to another. It's clever, compulsive and wasn't even created by one of Sente's star coders. John Kinsting, we salute you!

40 YEARS OF THE ZX SPECTRUM

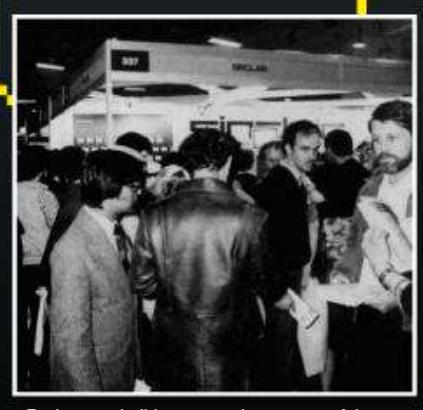
WORDS BY GRAEME MASON AND MARTYN CARROLL

When Sinclair launched the ZX Spectrum in April 1982 it would be inconceivable to those involved that we'd still be talking, writing and eulogising about it 40 years later. The Spectrum was launched at a time when demand for personal computers was growing and the cost of components was falling, which brought experimentation and innovation to the fore. Things were changing at such a pace that Sinclair adopted a 12-month hardware upgrade schedule. The clue was in the name: the ZX80 (1980) was followed by the ZX81 (1981), and the ZX82 and ZX83 were next in line.

Unlike the annual mobile device updates we see nowadays, these were no simple refreshes. The ZX81 was a silent, monochrome machine while the ZX82 added sound and colour capabilities. It was a clear step up and the addition of colour graphics prompted Sinclair to change the name from the ZX82 to the ZX Spectrum. But regardless of the new name, the Spectrum was still Sinclair's 1982 computer and a stepping stone to what was coming next, whether that was 32-bit or wafadrives or whatever was being cooked up in the Cambridge labs.

But as we all know, the Spectrum struck that fine balance between capability and cost. The sound was poor and the keyboard was *rubber* for God's sake, yet it outperformed many rival machines that were often costlier. The fast CPU, colour graphics and generous amount of memory also made it good for gaming. The result was a computer for the times that would go on to sell millions and play a significant role in the UK games industry. And so 40 years on, we celebrate the diminutive micro that defied the odds and refused to be superseded.

» Adventure game *The Hobbit* introduced a generation to interactive fiction and singing about gold.



» Excitement builds at an early computer fair.

"ANTICIPATION WAS BUILDING AND FINALLY, IN NOVEMBER, THE GAMES BEGAN TO APPEAR"

CTRUM

AS THE ZX SPECTRUM CELEBRATES ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY, RETRO GAMER MARKS THE OCCASION BY COMPILING A YEAR-BY-YEAR SCRAPBOOK OF THE EVENTS, GAMES AND PEOPLE THAT DEFINED THE ERA AND CREATED A GENERATION OF CODERS, GEEKS AND GAMERS

1982

It began on 23 April 1982, Sinclair unveiling the ZX Spectrum in all its rubber-keyed glory at the Earl's Court Computer Fair in London. Teething production troubles, however, meant that availability of the computer was scarce until the summer of 1982. Only then could the public, and more critically, developers, get their hands on either the £125 16K or £175 48K models.

As a result, software was also limited throughout the remainder of 1982, and it was only towards the end of the year that Spectrum owners got the chance to play professionally produced and programmed games. Even by June, magazine *Sinclair User* was still devoting significant space to the Spectrum's predecessor, the ZX81, while a focus on coding and practical applications held sway over gaming. But in the same issue, its close look at the new computer brought positive news. "The 48KB RAM is potentially as powerful as the Apple II costing around three times the price," the magazine reported together with photos of eager crowds at the Earl's Court show.

But two months later the Spectrum was still impossible to find, with an early batch of 16K machines discovered to be faulty and withdrawn before sale. Sinclair itself was seeking funding in the city to enable it to continue production of both the Spectrum and its other projects. Anticipation was building and finally, in November, the games began to appear. Sinclair's development partner Psion was behind some of the best, with *Space Raiders* and *Planetoids* riffing on the arcade games *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids* respectively.

With the Spectrum now readily available, the market expanded quickly and established publishers such as Melbourne House and Quicksilva became the early trailblazers. The January issue of *Sinclair User* (street date December 1982) contained a considerably larger selection of reviewed games, and the scene was set for the ZX Spectrum to take off in 1983.

HARDWARE>SOFTWARE

Following the much-reported delay for the Spectrum, Sinclair continued to plug the hardware side of its range. Interfaces, disk drives and the ZX Microdrive were frequently proclaimed in the press, the promise of ultra-fast loading times and ease-of-use beguiling readers that were eagerly lapping up this new technological revolution. Throughout 1982, Sinclair continued to push its dream of selling a range of add-ons for its new computer with the purchase of a Spectrum just the beginning.

DEFINING GAMES

PENETRATOR

PUBLISHER: MELBOURNE HOUSE
DEVELOPER: VERONIKA MEGLER & PHILIP MITCHELL
HIGHEST SCORE: 9/10 (C&VG)

One of many early arcade clones, Melbourne House's *Penetrator* took the classic sci-fi shoot-'em-up *Scramble* and gave it a Speccy twist, complete with a level designer with which gamers could create landscapes to bomb and destroy. A smart and shiny shooter, streets ahead of its competition.

HORACE GOES SKIING

PUBLISHER: PSION
DEVELOPER: WILLIAM TANG
HIGHEST SCORE: 5/5 (PERSONAL COMPUTER NEWS)

Psion coder William Tang had already created the *Pac-Man* clone *Hungry Horace* and the Spectrum games scene needed its mascots. A sweet combination of *Frogger* and downhill slalom, *Horace Goes Skiing* is comfortably the best of the *Horace* trilogy and a memorable early game.

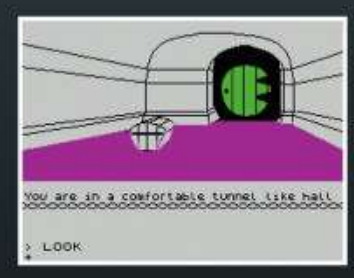
FOOTBALL MANAGER

PUBLISHER: ADDICTIVE GAMES
DEVELOPER: KEVIN TOMS
HIGHEST SCORE: 909/1000 (ACE)

The football management simulation remains popular today and it began here with Kevin Toms' *Football Manager*. The level of interaction and the strategic choice was remarkable for the time while the graphic representation adds some much-needed visual verve to proceedings.

THE HOBBIT

PUBLISHER: MELBOURNE HOUSE
DEVELOPER: VERONIKA MEGLER & PHILIP MITCHELL
HIGHEST SCORE: 9/10 (C&VG)



Adventure games were one of the cornerstones of the early Spectrum software scene and *The Hobbit* is rightly regarded as one of the best of all time on the computer. The inclusion of graphics – one of the first adventures to do so – comfortably elevated it above its peers.

ARCADIA

PUBLISHER: IMAGINE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: DAVID LAWSON
HIGHEST SCORE: 4/5 (HOME COMPUTING WEEKLY)

The sad passing of Imagine's David Lawson brought back memories of his earliest programming effort, a manic fixed shoot-'em-up that helped establish Imagine as one of the premier Spectrum software houses. Fast and exciting, its smooth gameplay ensured it sold by the bucket-loads.

1983

"HARDWARE SALES WERE GOING GANGBUSTERS, LARGELY THANKS TO A DEEP PRICE CUT"

» [ZX Spectrum] Ultimate's bug-blaster *Pssst* was one of just ten titles that Sinclair released on cartridge format.

The supply problems finally started to ease as the Spectrum was made available to buy in WHSmith and other high-street chains. Some larger stores even created special areas where potential buyers could get hands-on with the hardware and the latest software. And talking of software, when it came to Spectrum games this is the year when the volume of releases really exploded. Owners were suddenly spoiled for choice – although the actual range of game styles was rather limited. If you loved *Space Invaders* and *Galaxians* in the arcades then you were in luck, as there were more than 20 unofficial clones to choose from. There were also around a dozen versions of both *Pac-Man* and *Frogger* available, and God knows how many nondescript maze games.

Thankfully there were a few original gems amongst all the coin-op clones. The games we've selected for this year are very predictable, but on release they were crucial in demonstrating the capabilities of the Spectrum, particularly when compared to the offerings on other micros. Most UK software houses hedged their bets and released games for a range of computers, but for the likes of Bug-Byte, Imagine Software, Quicksilva and Ultimate Play The Game, the Spectrum emerged as their lead format simply because that's where the biggest market was. Hardware sales were going gangbusters, largely thanks to a price cut in May when the 16K model was reduced to £99 (thereby becoming the first colour computer to retail for less than £100) and the 48K version fell to £129 (which in hindsight was the real bargain of the day).

The Spectrum's first milestone arrived in August when Sinclair announced that UK and European sales had topped half a million. And it showed no sign of slowing, with more than 50,000 machines sold every month in the UK in the run up to the crucial Christmas period. However, it wasn't all good news on the hardware front. The Interface 1 and Microdrive combo – Sinclair's low-cost tape-loop storage system – finally arrived in September, 16 months late, and immediately ran into reliability issues. The Interface 2 arrived the same month and added a ROM cart slot, but it never caught on and only ten cart games were ever released. These were setbacks for sure, but did it really matter when Sinclair already had a majority 42% share of the UK home micro market?

ARISE SIR CLIVE

■ In June 1983 it was announced that Clive Sinclair, affectionately 'Uncle Clive' to many, was to become Sir Clive as he was the recipient of a knighthood in the Queen's birthday honours list. Aged just 42 at the time, he was awarded the honour for his contribution to the UK computer industry, and in particular the achievement of delivering micros for the masses with the ZX81 and Spectrum. He called the award a "truly great honour".

DEFING GAMES

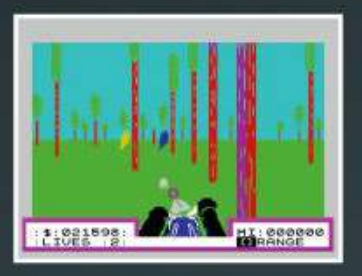
JETPAC

PUBLISHER: ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
DEVELOPER: ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
HIGHEST SCORE: 9/10 (C&VG)

■ Ultimate burst onto the scene with the perfect debut that showcased its development flair and highlighted the Spectrum's arcade credentials. *Jetpac* was the polished space shooter that set the standard that all other developers strived for.

DEATHCHASE

PUBLISHER: MICROMEGA
DEVELOPER: MJ ESTCOURT
HIGHEST SCORE: 92% (CRASH)



■ Like *Jetpac*, this was another expansive title that somehow ran on a 16K Spectrum. It was the first game to really deliver 3D thrills as you raced through the forest, dodging trees. It was also the best unofficial *Star Wars* game on the Spectrum.

MANIC MINER

PUBLISHER: BUG-BYTE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: MATTHEW SMITH
HIGHEST SCORE: 9/10 (C&VG)

■ In the era of single-screen games Matthew Smith designed this platformer par excellence that featured 20 unique levels, each a mini puzzle. Along with its follow-up, *Jet Set Willy*, this classic has become synonymous with the Spectrum.

ANT ATTACK

PUBLISHER: QUICKSILVA
DEVELOPER: SANDY WHITE & ANGELA SUTHERLAND
HIGHEST SCORE: 85% (CRASH)

■ The early years were full of 'wow' moments, when you first glimpsed a game and it instantly resonated. *Ant Attack* and its isometric graphics provided one of those for many, pulling you right into the stark, ant-infested city of Antescher.

CHUCKIE EGG

PUBLISHER: A&F SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: NIGEL ALDERTON
HIGHEST SCORE: 80% (CRASH)

■ This classic platform and ladders game replicated the speed and smoothness of titles you'd expect to find in the arcades. While it's hotly disputed in some circles, we feel that this was easily the best version of the classic game.

1984

Having brought computers into the home, Sinclair shifted its gaze to the office and introduced the QL (Quantum Leap) business machine in January. It was a bold move and ultimately a disastrous one, with sales of just 44,000 during this year. Despite this setback, Sinclair revealed in March that its turnover during the previous 12 months had climbed 42% to £77.7 million – and this was mainly driven by sales of Spectrum hardware and software. Worryingly, profits had stayed static and this was blamed on costs incurred by the development of the QL and TV80, Sinclair's pocket TV that launched to indifference in October 1983.

On the third-party software front, new publishers were seemingly popping up daily to release games for the UK's best-selling home computer. Some publishers – notably Ocean Software, Elite Systems and Software Projects – began to really establish themselves and gain footholds in the market. Ocean and Elite were quick to pick up on the value of licences, but it would be a while before licensed properties dominated the market. One noticeable casualty was Imagine, the Liverpool-based software house which collapsed in July 1984 following months of speculation about its solvency. Software piracy was a genuine problem in the industry by this point, and it was suggested that copying games had contributed to Imagine's demise. Yet it was clear that the firm had succumbed to problems of its own making. It 'Bandersnatched' itself basically.

» [ZX Spectrum] Ocean scored a cracker this year with Jon Ritman's classy football game *Match Day*.

The failure of the QL and other ventures prompted Sinclair to look at what *was* working, so its focus returned to the Spectrum. In August it wisely dropped the 16K model and set about repackaging the 48K machine. The result was the Spectrum+ which arrived in October and featured a moving keyboard borrowed from the QL. While these days we see the original rubber keyboard as part of the Spectrum's charm, it was far from the most practical feature so it made sense to update it. Less logical was the price tag of £179, but this was offset somewhat by the inclusion of a six-game software pack (which Sinclair claimed was worth £67 – yeah right).

For gamers the year ended on a high when Ultimate released not one but two *Sabreman* games just before Christmas. The firm had previously boasted that it was streets ahead of the competition, and the quick-fire arrival of *Underwurlde* and *Knight Lore* proved that its bullishness was entirely justified.

CRASH LANDS

■ Having initially begun life as a mail order catalogue featuring write-ups of the latest games, the first proper issue of *Crash* – "The Monthly Spectrum Software Review" – went on sale on 13 January 1984. It proved to be a lucky day for editor Roger Kean and his Newsfield crew, as the mag would run for years and its success would spawn sister mags *Zzap!64* and *The Games Machine*. For many *Crash* was the most respected source of Spectrum reviews.

» A rare glimpse of *Bandersnatch*, the much-hyped 'mega game' that contributed to the fall of Imagine Software.

"PUBLISHERS WERE SEEMINGLY POPPING UP DAILY TO RELEASE GAMES FOR THE UK'S BEST-SELLING HOME COMPUTER"

DEFINING GAMES

SABRE WULF

PUBLISHER: ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
DEVELOPER: ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
HIGHEST SCORE: 91% (CRASH)

■ The first *Sabreman* adventure is well remembered for its large map, colourful graphics, excellent animation – and £10 price tag. Was it worth paying a premium for a good-looking maze game that came in a nice box? Absolutely.

THE LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

PUBLISHER: BEYOND SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: MIKE SINGLETON
HIGHEST SCORE: 10/10 (PCG)

■ Calling any Spectrum game an 'epic' was audacious, especially if it was your own, but Mike Singleton was entirely justified. This strategy adventure war game featured 4,000 locations, 32 playable characters and multiple ways to win. Epic indeed.

SKOOL DAZE

PUBLISHER: MICROSPHERE
DEVELOPER: DAVID REIDY & KEITH WARRINGTON
HIGHEST SCORE: 93% (CRASH)

■ A formative experience growing up with the Spectrum involved renaming all the teachers in this game to your real ones, then running around firing catapults, scrawling on the blackboards and generally causing mayhem. They were the happiest daze.

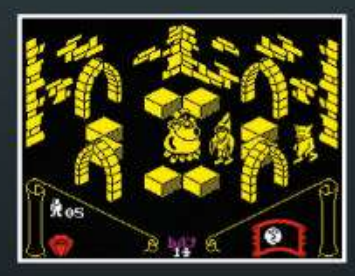
DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON

PUBLISHER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE: 8/10 (SINCLAIR USER)

■ Taking *Track & Field* and aligning it with a home-grown sporting hero was a marketing masterstroke by Ocean, resulting in a massive Christmas number one. *Hyper Sports* and *Super Test* were better games, but the original was iconic.

KNIGHT LORE

PUBLISHER: ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
DEVELOPER: ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
HIGHEST SCORE: 10/10 (PCG)



■ The gall of Ultimate, casually creating a new game style for an ongoing series. The third *Sabreman* adventure introduced us to the incredible 'Filmation' system which brought isometric worlds to life and led to a multitude of copycat games.

» Ultimate wrapped up the year in style with the release of two instant Speccy classics.

» The Spectrum+ was another good seller, but its success would come at a price.

1985

There was plenty of excitement around the Sinclair computer at the start of this year with publisher US Gold proclaiming, "There's never been a better time to own a Spectrum…" in January, and it was hard not to get engaged with the upbeat mood. While Christmas 1984 had brought gentle disappointment to some – Ultimate aside – the promise of gaming riches throughout 1985 was enticing even more people to the Sinclair computer. It was now virtually unknown for commercial games to feature any BASIC code, even the budget titles of companies such as Mastertronic. And while Sir Clive Sinclair himself may have bristled at the popularity of gaming on his computer, it undoubtedly helped sell the machine throughout Europe.

It was in 1985 that the inexorable rise of licensed games began, starting with Elite's rock-hard chopper game, *Airwolf*. Bearing little resemblance to the series beyond its helicopter, *Airwolf* has come to represent the arch-difficulty of many Spectrum games, but its extreme success helped bankroll Elite's dip into arcade game licensing and encouraged other software houses to investigate this strange new world of optioning IPs from film and television. The US Gold/Ocean Software relationship had already produced several arcade hits but these companies would soon go their separate ways, contesting in a pitched battle for licences throughout the Eighties.

Meanwhile, Sinclair itself was busy, working on its new Spectrum. However, the company and its popular micro were beginning to become victims of their success. Rumours abounded throughout the year until, finally, autumn brought the new 128K Spectrum… to Spain. Conscious of the large stocks of the ZX Spectrum+ that remained in the UK, Sinclair decided to focus on shifting as many of its 48K computers as possible before moving on to the superior model. The result was envious eyes across Europe as the Spanish company Investronica manufactured and distributed the 128K Spectrum across the Spanish-speaking world. "Spectrum Plus sales will be safe over the Christmas period," noted *Crash* magazine in October, "with the 128K safely on holiday in Spain earning revenue in a whole new marketplace. Everyone at home, meantime, is kept in the dark ages of 48K."

It was a bemusing decision by Sinclair to neglect its biggest market, but the games kept coming for the 48K machines as developers managed to squeeze more out of the machine. Technically marvellous efforts such as *Starion*, *Dragontorc*, *Shadowfire* and *I, Of The Mask* rubbed shoulders with the growing budget market, with titles such as David Jones' *Finders Keepers* providing amazing value for money. As we headed into 1986, it was clear the ZX Spectrum 48K was going nowhere.

THE DIXONS DEAL

■ When Sinclair advanced plans to release its 128K Spectrum in 1985, retailer Dixons, having paid a reported £10 million to secure a massive number of the Spectrum+ model, was understandably miffed. Anxious of upsetting one of its largest partners in the UK, the result was a Spanish release for the 128K while UK owners had to wait until the following year, although parents were then inevitably reluctant to shell out for another computer so soon after purchasing the Dixons bundle.

» [ZX Spectrum] Throughout 1985, Spectrum games became more complex, such as the icon-driven sci-fi adventure, *Shadowfire*.

"RUMOURS ABOUNDED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR UNTIL, FINALLY, AUTUMN BROUGHT THE NEW 128K SPECTRUM… TO SPAIN"

DEFINING GAMES

COMMANDO

PUBLISHER: ELITE SYSTEMS
DEVELOPER: KEITH BURKHILL & NIGEL ALDERTON
HIGHEST SCORE: 5/5 (SINCLAIR USER)

■ Elite had already dabbled with licensing but it was this fantastic home port of the Capcom hit that catapulted it into the big time. A huge seller, its accurate recreation of the original's gameplay confirmed that arcade conversions could be done, and done well on the Speccy.

SABOTEUR!

PUBLISHER: DURELL SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: CLIVE TOWNSEND
HIGHEST SCORE: 5/5 (SINCLAIR USER)

■ Durell fully cemented its position as a premier Spectrum software house with this ninja caper from creator Clive Townsend. Featuring a huge atmospheric open world full of killer dogs and guards, this was one mission guaranteed to provide plenty of thrills and excitement.

STARQUAKE

PUBLISHER: BUBBLE BUS SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: STEPHEN CROW
HIGHEST SCORE: 96% (CRASH)

■ In 1985, lucky Sinclair gamers got this superlative comical arcade adventure from Stephen Crow and Bubble Bus. Featuring the loveable – thing – known as BLOB, *Starquake* takes place over dozens of colourful and frantic screens as the round hero attempts to save the universe.

FINDERS KEEPERS

PUBLISHER: MASTERTRONIC
DEVELOPER: DAVID JONES
HIGHEST SCORE: 9/10 (PERSONAL COMPUTER GAMES)

■ It wasn't until David Jones and Mastertronic released this, the first of the *Magic Knight* trilogy, that budget games began to hold their own against their full-price counterparts. Fun, engaging and surprisingly deep, *Finders Keepers* defined what could be purchased for just £1.99.

MONTY ON THE RUN

PUBLISHER: GREMLIN GRAPHICS
DEVELOPER: PETER HARRAP
HIGHEST SCORE: 94% (CRASH)

■ Thanks to classics such as *Jet Set Willy*, platform games came to define the Spectrum. Gremlin's *Monty On The Run* continued this tradition, as Monty Mole attempts to escape the law and board a ferry to Europe. Insanely difficult in places, yet always entertaining.

1986

» The poor Sinclair Spectrum 128K lasted just six months.

» [ZX Spectrum] Arcade-standard graphics on the Speccy! Well, not quite, but *Light Force* was still an impressively attribute-free shoot-'em-up.

While the great games continued to appear, and the Spectrum software market, in general, went from strength to strength, 1986 was a turbulent year for Sinclair itself. After the Spanish release of the 128K model the previous autumn, the UK finally saw the computer at retail in February of this year. The problem was, the push by retailers the previous Christmas meant that thousands of new 48K machines were currently being enjoyed by eager youngsters. Parents, many of whom were still under the ill-informed impression that computing was 'just a fad', were understandably disinclined to shell out £180 on yet another computer just two months later.

The Sinclair woes didn't stop there. Determined to pour everything into the development of its ill-fated C5 electric vehicle, the company was struggling. Having shifted focus back on the Spectrum following the failure of the QL, the lukewarm reception to the 128K was certainly not ideal. Positioned as a games machine (unlike its predecessor), the new model offered vastly superior sound and memory – but sadly little else, including an identical display when owners were quite within their rights to have expected some sort of visual improvement.

Fortunately for 48K owners, the games kept on coming, and for many 1986 represents the finest year for software on the Spectrum. In a continued theme of fascinating variety, owners could enjoy open-world extravaganzas such as Durell Software's *Turbo Esprit*; attribute-free arcade shoot-'em-ups such as *Light Force* or the elegiac *Starglider*; atmospheric chin-strokers *The Sentinel* and *The Great Escape*, and of course, delightfully British capers such as Gremlin's amiable *Jack The Nipper*. What's more, the leading Spectrum magazine, *Crash*, finally hit six figures, regularly selling over 100,000 copies a month throughout the year. Despite a virtual marketing blackout of the 128K from Sinclair – or maybe, because of it – for 48K owners, at least those interested in games, 1986 was a fantastic year.

And yet behind the software, the turbulence brewed, culminating in April's buyout of Sinclair by rival Amstrad, and £5 million is how much it took for Alan Sugar's company to purchase the Spectrum brand and its related products. Amstrad quickly put a new Spectrum, the +2, into turnaround and it appeared in the autumn, complete with an in-built cassette player, something Sinclair had always been reluctant to include. The original 128K 'toastie' computer – so nicknamed because of its distinctive heatsink – didn't stand a chance and sunk into obscurity, a mere six months after its UK release.

» Dedicated Spectrum magazines such as *Crash* grew massively during 1986.

THE RISE OF THE RE-RELEASE

■ While budget houses such as Mastertronic had been stealthily repackaging older games for some time, it wasn't until 1986 and Elite's budget £2.99 Classics range that the idea finally caught on. Its initial slew of releases included oldie-but-goodie classics such as *Deathchase* and *Skool Daze*, but they sold well and soon every software house would have a budget sub-label, usually giving its old games a new lease of life at a low price.

"FOR 48K OWNERS, AT LEAST THOSE INTERESTED IN GAMES, 1986 WAS A FANTASTIC YEAR"

DEFINING GAMES

TURBO ESPRIT

PUBLISHER: DURELL SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: MIKE RICHARDSON
HIGHEST SCORE: 5/5 (SINCLAIR USER)

■ Open-world games had existed before on the Spectrum, but Mike Richardson's driving caper remains a true technical wonder. *Turbo Esprit*'s world teems with life as the player charges around its dangerous streets, making it one of the most evocative gaming experiences of the Eighties.

JACK THE NIPPER

PUBLISHER: GREMLIN GRAPHICS
DEVELOPER: GREG HOLMES & PETER HARRAP
HIGHEST SCORE: 5/5 (SINCLAIR USER)

■ Few games gave such a distinctly British vibe as Gremlin's inventive cartoon caper. Presented in a beautiful clean style, *Jack The Nipper* is a delightfully original game infused with an endearing child-like spirit, plus you get to wield a peashooter.

BOMB JACK

PUBLISHER: ELITE SYSTEMS
DEVELOPER: ELITE SYSTEMS
HIGHEST SCORE: 92% (CRASH)

■ Revered by many – and even claimed to be better than the original by some – *Bomb Jack* is as fun and easy to play as it was 35-odd years ago. It's one of the finest arcade ports on any home system in any era.

COBRA

PUBLISHER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE: 93% (CRASH)

■ There were few movie games as good as Cobra, coded by Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith and arguably more fun than the insipid Sylvester Stallone actioner itself. Across three short scenes, the level of creativity in *Cobra* is incredible, and it's all the better for often having little bearing on the movie.

QUAZATRON

PUBLISHER: HEWSON CONSULTANTS
DEVELOPER: STEVE TURNER
HIGHEST SCORE: 5/5 (YOUR COMPUTER)

■ Spectrum owners never got an official version of the C64 hit *Paradroid*, but they did get *Quazatron*, Steve Turner's brilliant reimagining of Andrew Braybrook's masterpiece. Set on a series of isometric levels, the addictive grappling minigame helps make *Quazatron* a pleasure to play.

1987

In this year the coin-op and movie licences began to dominate the release schedule. You only had to look at the year's first issue of *Crash* to see reviews of *Gauntlet*, *Terra Cresta*, *Donkey Kong*, *Elevator Action* and several other arcade conversions, while on the film front it was a case of the good (*Aliens*), the bad (*Highlander*) and the ugly (*Top Gun*). Even the adventure section was licence-heavy with reviews of *The Colour Of Magic*, *Dracula* and (believe it or not) *The Archers*. Editor Graeme Kidd reflected on all these licences in his editorial, calling it "a disturbing trend". It wouldn't change any time soon.

Talking of *Crash*, this was a golden period for the publication. It remained the UK's best-selling Spectrum mag with average monthly sales of 96,590 during the second-half of the year. There was change in the air though, as the era of the magazine covertape was upon us. Of the three main Spectrum mags, *Your Sinclair* was the first to carry covertapes and in this year the mag covermounted two full games – Ocean's *Road Race* and, one of our games of the year, *Batty* from Elite. *Crash* responded with a tape featuring several demos and so the first shots were fired in the covertape wars.

Having produced the +2, Amstrad predictably moved ahead with the +3, which was the Spectrum equivalent of the CPC 6128, featuring a built-in 3-inch disk drive. To the surprise of just about everyone, it launched in July 1987 for an eye-watering £249. It then quickly dropped to £199 before Christmas, with Amstrad admitting that it inflated the launch price cost so it could promote the '£50 off!' offer later in the year. Ho-hum. As with the Microdrive before it, the promise of expansive games that would take advantage of the new storage format was never realised. Besides loading quicker, only a small number of games added disk-only content and even then it was typically an extra screen here or a different tune there.

The year ended as it begun with yet more licences, specifically the behemoth that was US Gold's *Out Run*. Such was the clamour for this conversion that it would have sold shed-loads even if it had been terrible. As such, it was just good enough, but the star Sega conversion this Christmas was Activision's *Super Hang-On*.

"THE ERA OF THE MAGAZINE COVERTAPE WAS UPON US"

ZERO TO Z88

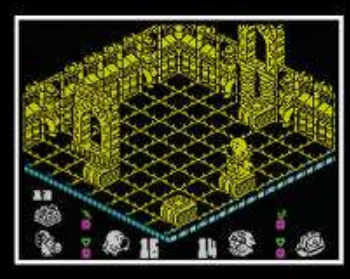
Having to sell his computer business to Amstrad was a low point for Sir Clive, but as many expected, he was soon back with a new firm and a new machine. For years at Sinclair he had tried to launch a portable computer (the ill-fated Pandora) and he finally managed it with the Z88. Featuring an eight-line LCD screen and a membrane keyboard, the Z88 was a nice idea that the technology of the day wasn't really able to deliver. You couldn't play *Horace Goes Skiing* on it either.

» [ZX Spectrum] *Bubble Bobble* from Firebird was one of the many coin-op conversions that landed on the Speccy this year.

DEFINING GAMES

HEAD OVER HEELS

PUBLISHER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: JON RITMAN & BERNIE DRUMMOND
HIGHEST SCORE: 9/10 (YOUR SINCLAIR)



Ultimate pioneered isometric adventures with *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*, but it was Ritman and Drummond who perfected the style with this delightful cartoon romp. Was there a bigger, better, cleverer game available for the Spectrum? Doubtful.

DRILLER

PUBLISHER: INCENTIVE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: INCENTIVE SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE: 97% (CRASH)

A 3D world rendered with filled polygons that you could freely explore? *Driller* and its 'Freescape' system delivered on that promise. The gameplay was fiddly, and the follow-ups were better, but the impact of the original cannot be overstated.

BATTY

PUBLISHER: ELITE SYSTEMS
DEVELOPER: MARK BETTERIDGE
HIGHEST SCORE: 85% (CRASH)

The details of why *Batty*, an *Arkanoid* clone that was better than both of Ocean's official Spectrum conversions, was given away on a magazine covertape are not entirely certain, but it was damn-fine news for readers of *Your Sinclair* that month.

EXOLON

PUBLISHER: HEWSON CONSULTANTS
DEVELOPER: RAFFAELE CECCO
HIGHEST SCORE: 10/10 (SINCLAIR USER)

Many programmers reduced the number of on-screen colours to avoid attribute clash, but Raffaele Cecco was having none of that. *Exolon* was his run-and-gun masterwork that featured large sprites, full-on action and loads of glorious colour.

OUT RUN

PUBLISHER: US GOLD
DEVELOPER: PROBE SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE: 8/10 (YOUR SINCLAIR)

Not the best game of the year but certainly the biggest. US Gold went all out with this conversion that managed to replicate the look if not the feel of Sega's flagship racer. Full marks for trying – and convincing everyone that they needed it.

» [ZX Spectrum] *Double Dragon* was aiming to top the Christmas charts, but it was beaten to the punch by Ocean's *RoboCop*.

1988

"THE RACE FOR THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER ONE WAS THE MOST HOTLY CONTESTED YET"

After a solid 1987, this is the year when Ocean began to pull away from the pack. Once *Out Run* had disappeared around the bend, the Manchester firm spent more time at the top of the sales charts than any other publisher. *Platoon*, *Target: Renegade* and *Daley Thomson's Olympic Challenge* all enjoyed spells at the number one spot, while *Combat School*, *Match Day II*, *Where Time Stood Still* and *Operation Wolf* figured strongly in the top ten. Asked about its success by *Sinclair User*, software manager Gary Bracey said, "We've finally got rid of the *Knight Rider* reputation and sorted out our schedules." As evidenced by the games we've selected this year, it wasn't just about the numbers – Ocean was now putting out some top-drawer titles. Even its licences were challenging expectations: compare the considered, multi-stage treatment of *Platoon* with the one-note approach of Activision's *Predator*.

Ocean and other publishers began to leverage the magazine covertapes. If a review hadn't convinced you, why not play a one-level demo and make up your own mind? In return for covermounting the latest demos, publishers would often stump up one of their back catalogue titles for the tapes. It was a win-win situation and *Sinclair User* began to include a tape with every issue from March onwards, with *Your Sinclair* following suit in October (*Crash* would hold out until the middle of the following year). The presence of the tapes didn't noticeably affect the contents of the actual mags, at least not at this point in time.

On the hardware front, retailers reported that the new Amstrad machines were selling briskly, particularly the +2. There were regular reports in the press that Amstrad was readying some kind of super-duper +4, but in the end what we got was the Spectrum +2A, which was a cost-reduced +2 with added support for an external disk drive, and the Sinclair PC-200, a PC clone that nobody asked for and nobody bought. There were also reports of a Spectrum clone code-named 'Sam', but more on that later.

The race for the Christmas number one was the most hotly contested yet. It was expected that another coin-op conversion would win out, and *Operation Wolf*, *After Burner*, *Thunder Blade* and *Double Dragon* were all jockeying for position, but in the end it was the game based on the film *RoboCop* that came out of nowhere and took the top spot, continuing Ocean's winning run.

PIRANHA SINKS

You'd imagine that focusing on licensed games would almost guarantee success at this time, but not so for Piranha. Created by publisher Macmillan, Piranha put out several excellent tie-in games including *The Trap Door*, *Nosferatu* and *The Colour Of Magic*. Reviews were strong but sales were seemingly lacking, as Macmillan pulled the plug in early 1988, less than 24 months after it launched the label. As a result several announced games including *Halo Jones* and *Judge Death* were canned.

DEFINING GAMES

TARGET: RENEGADE

PUBLISHER: IMAGINE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE: 92% (YOUR SINCLAIR)

Ocean missed out on the *Double Dragon* licence, so it hit back with its own version that added weapons and co-op play to *Renegade*'s winning formula. Needless to say it floored *Double Dragon* with a swift knee to the groin.

KIKSTART 2

PUBLISHER: MASTERTRONIC
DEVELOPER: ICON DESIGN
HIGHEST SCORE: 8/10 (SINCLAIR USER)

This was Mastertronic's best-selling original title on the Spectrum, shifting an amazing 130,000 copies. There was no secret to its success – just a fun two-player tear-up with a built-in course designer, all for £2. There was no sound, but still…

WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

PUBLISHER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: DENTON DESIGNS
HIGHEST SCORE: 96% (SINCLAIR USER)

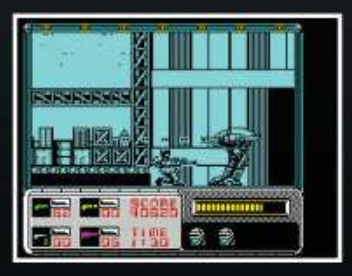
Many games offered 128K enhancements but they'd still run on 48K machines. This blockbuster from Denton Designs was designed exclusively for 128K models and the result was a sprawling adventure that genuinely justified upgrading your machine.

R-TYPE

PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: CATALYST CODERS
HIGHEST SCORE: 93% (C&VG)

Coder Bob Pape somehow managed to shoehorn Irem's arcade spectacle onto the Spectrum, huge bosses and all. This was not just the best blaster, or the best coin-op conversion, but simply one of the best games available for the Spectrum.

ROBOCOP



PUBLISHER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE: 95% (C&VG)

It's the game that everyone bought eight copies of, as it dominated the sales charts for almost a year. The combination of a red-hot licence and a genuinely great game paid off handsomely for Ocean. Superb music from Jon Dunn too.

1989

As 1989 dawned, Ocean's mega movie licence *RoboCop* dominated the Spectrum scene. Picked up for a song given the film's status as a sleeper hit, Ocean took the plaudits for securing the rights to a game based on the violent movie and its development team of Mike Lamb and Dawn Drake produced the goods with a magnificently diverse and fun experience. Away from software, Spectrum peripheral manufacturer Miles Gordon Technology (MGT) announced in January that it would be producing an 8-bit supercomputer called the SAM Coupe. With a mammoth 256K of RAM, six-channel sound and a custom Z80B processor chip it was certainly a step up – but why of such interest to Spectrum owners? Simple: the computer would offer a 48K Spectrum mode, allowing – in theory – for most Spectrum games to run on it.

As the year progressed, arcade and other licences continued to dominate the Spectrum computer-game scene with full-price original games few and far between. It would turn into a dramatic year for most of the Spectrum games magazines as the proliferation of covermounted games and demos continued apace. June of this year marked a particularly sad moment when the editorial content of *Crash* magazine was suddenly whittled down from over 90 pages to just 34. Once you got past a smattering of reviews and pages of adverts, there was little else to everyone's favourite Spectrum magazine, now a pale shadow of its former self.

Spectrum brand owner Amstrad also endured a painful year. The 16-bit computers (particularly early runner the Atari ST) were beginning to make their mark and the latest tape-based version of the computer, the +2A, was suffering from unfortunate compatibility issues. While a different colour (black, to the +2's grey), Amstrad's use of identical packaging upset some users who wanted to stick with the grey model.

The demographic of Spectrum users themselves was also changing rapidly. With older siblings moving to Atari STs and Amigas, many 48K Spectrums found their way to younger children and the games market followed this trend, with budget software houses such as Alternative Software marketing lines of games based on children's cartoons. With vast numbers of games being given away on the cover of all the Spectrum magazines and virtually every major software house having a sub-label for re-releasing old titles, gamers after something fresh and original were finding pickings even slimmer throughout 1989.

THE COVERTAPE WARS

The constant battle to get games, demos and more onto the covers of the three main Spectrum mags reached a crescendo in 1989. The shift in emphasis resulted in *Crash* slimming down its editorial content as its publishers focused on the compilation-style cassettes it offered on the front cover. Like a forebear to the kids' magazines of today, the magazine itself was likely barely glanced at once the tape had been removed from its cover by an eager young Speccy owner.

DEFINING GAMES

MYTH: HISTORY IN THE MAKING

PUBLISHER: SYSTEM 3 SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: NEIL DODWELL & DAVID DEW
HIGHEST SCORE: 96% (CRASH)

A rare original gem in among the licensed fare, System 3 cleverly focused on making each version of *Myth* system-specific, meaning Spectrum fans had a significantly different version of this mythical trawl through history. A sleek arcade adventure with beautifully intricate graphics.

LICENCE TO KILL

PUBLISHER: DOMARK SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: QUIXEL
HIGHEST SCORE: 80% (CRASH)

James Bond games had had a patchy record up until this Domark effort; finally, fans of the suave spy got the Spectrum game they deserved. From a helicopter chase to on-foot battles and tanker driving, *Licence To Kill* proved that movie adaptations didn't have to be by the numbers or just plain awful.

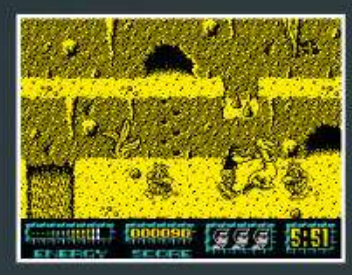
RICK DANGEROUS

PUBLISHER: FIREBIRD
DEVELOPER: DAVID PRIDMORE
HIGHEST SCORE: 87% (C&VG)

In its oversized card box and glossy slipcase, *Rick Dangerous* certainly looked the part. While the gameplay has since been criticised for its trial-and-error frustration method of testing the player, it was one of the biggest, brightest and biggest-selling Spectrum games of 1989.

RENEGADE III: THE FINAL CHAPTER

PUBLISHER: IMAGINE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE: 91% (CRASH)



Few games demonstrate the change of Spectrum demographic more than the third in this popular series. Eschewing the gritty urban style of the earlier games, *Renegade III* opts for a fantastical story, jettisoning its hero across time and up against cute dinosaurs and cavemen. It's as terrible as it sounds.

FANTASY WORLD DIZZY

PUBLISHER: CODEMASTERS
DEVELOPER: THE OLIVER TWINS & NEIL ADAMSON
HIGHEST SCORE: 94% (CRASH)

Featuring the series' trademark cute graphics and a range of puzzles just on the right side of frustrating, this third *Dizzy* game garnered considerable praise in the press and is still considered one of the best of the series today. All for the bargain price of £2.99.

"WITH OLDER SIBLINGS MOVING ON TO ATARI STS AND AMIGAS, MANY 48K SPECTRUMS FOUND THEIR WAY TO YOUNGER CHILDREN"

1990

While there would be no further Spectrums in the works, February 1990 finally saw the SAM Coupe released in the UK. The MGT computer, despite being a marked improvement over the Speccy, sadly compared poorly to the now-established Commodore Amiga and Atari ST. Despite some neat tricks and backwards compatibility for Spectrum games, it was destined to flop and MGT would soon be no more as well.

Games-wise, arcade licences, in particular, continued to dominate, but that doesn't mean there weren't some excellent releases, with Ocean's *Midnight Resistance* and *Rainbow Islands* proving particularly pleasing. Meanwhile, the shift to pamphlet status did *Crash* magazine no favours at all as it slipped down to third in the Spectrum magazine popularity chart behind *Your Sinclair* and *Sinclair User*. *Crash* would limp on, regardless, but in reality, all three were suffering.

Keen to promote its existing computers, Amstrad revealed its Plus range in 1990 and at the same time quietly dropped production of the ZX Spectrum +3 model. While the +2 (actually +2A) would soldier on, it was the end of the line for the superior disk-based machine. On a notionally similar, but generally unrelated note, Codemasters created the first Spectrum compilation on compact disc early in 1990, with over 30 of its games available with super-quick loading times once you hooked up your computer to a CD player. Games on CD? Who'd have thunk it?

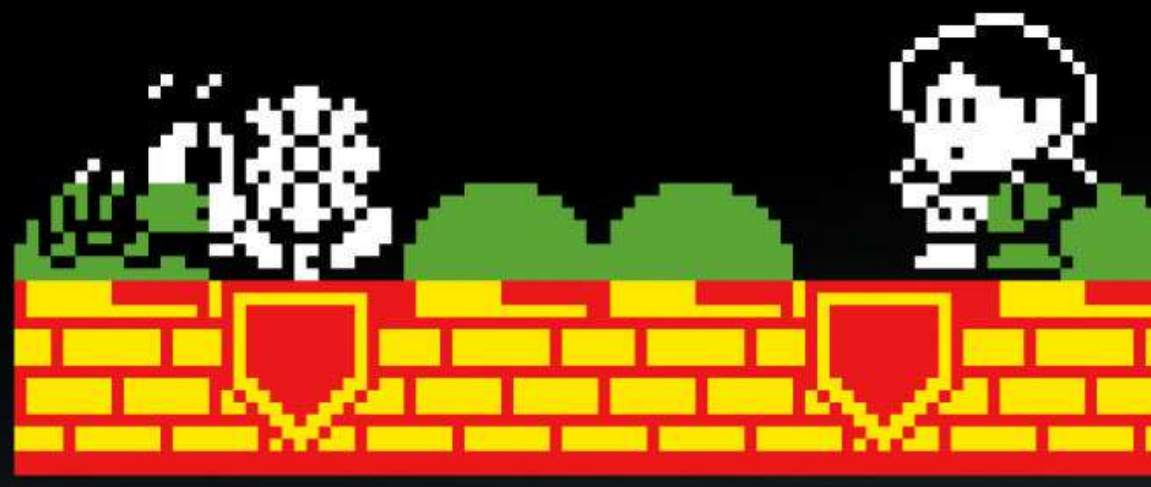
Traditional cassette compilations had been dominating the Spectrum software scene for some years, especially around Christmas time when their large chocolate box-style containers made them appealing for parents looking for gifts. Christmas of 1990 brought Ocean's *Hollywood Collection*, featuring the movie games *RoboCop*, *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, *Ghostbusters II* and *Batman*. But the continued policy of multiple games on the cover of magazines month after month saturated the market, and when Ocean Software announced that it was going to be producing 128K games only, it felt like the end of an old era rather than the start of an exciting new one.

Amazingly, the Spectrum would show remarkable legs, with commercial games seeing the light of day even three years later. But for most fans of the dogged little computer, which first appeared on that significant spring day of 1982, its best times were well behind it. Yet on the Spectrum continued as the new decade unfolded.

» It's Christmas 1990 and compilations are as popular as ever.

THE END OF THE +3

"The Spectrum +3 is dead," reported *Crash* in its November 1990 issue. The disk-based Spectrum, in the hands of 15% of Spectrum owners according to the article, was unceremoniously dumped by Amstrad, leaving the cassette-based +2 as the lone flag bearer for the Speccy. The main reason for the drop appeared to be Amstrad's imminent release of its Amstrad CPC 6128 Plus machine, although it's difficult to see how potential business users (Amstrad's target) would have ever considered the disk-based Spectrum. Either way, the +3 was indeed history.



"GAMES-WISE, ARCADE LICENCES, IN PARTICULAR, CONTINUED TO DOMINATE"

DEFINING GAMES

LORDS OF CHAOS

PUBLISHER: BLADE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: JULIAN GOLLOP
HIGHEST SCORE: 90% (YOUR SINCLAIR)

Julian Gollop had already created the superb *Rebelstar* and *Laser Squad* games and provided sequels and expansions to both. In 1990, the ace coder finally followed up on his 1985 cult hit *Chaos* with another deep and engrossing strategy game that pitches more warring wizards against each other.

MIDNIGHT RESISTANCE

PUBLISHER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: SPECIAL FX
HIGHEST SCORE: 93% (CRASH)

Having cut his teeth with his previous arcade conversion of *Cabal*, Special FX's Jim Bagley created his masterpiece with this incredibly faithful port of the Data East arcade game. Tough and cartoonishly beautiful, *Midnight Resistance* helped brighten up the dull 1990 summer for Spectrum fans.

EARTH SHAKER

PUBLISHER: YOUR SINCLAIR
DEVELOPER: MICHAEL BATTY
HIGHEST SCORE: 83% (BIT)

Earth Shaker, a *Your Sinclair* exclusive, may not be the most original of games – it owes a considerable debt to the venerable First Star Software series *Boulder Dash* – yet it more than makes up for this with cunning gameplay and cute, colourful graphics. A little gem among the covertapes.

RAINBOW ISLANDS

PUBLISHER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: GRAFTGOLD
HIGHEST SCORE: 95% (C&VG)

Erstwhile Hewson developer Graftgold and publisher Ocean launched this Taito sequel onto the Spectrum and Steve Turner's team of David O'Connor and John Cumming did him proud. Retaining all the whimsical charm of the arcade original, *Rainbow Islands* was a huge hit in the spring of 1990.

SIM CITY

PUBLISHER: INFOGRAMES
DEVELOPER: PROBE SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE: 93% (YOUR SINCLAIR)

It's hard to believe the original city-building classic appeared on the ZX Spectrum, but it did, courtesy of Maxis and Infogrames. Coded by Anthony Hartley with graphics by Simon Butler, it's a compact and efficient version of the original that showed there was still appetite for complex games on the Speccy.

1991+

The price of the 16-bit computers continued to fall and by 1991 you could pick up an Atari ST or even an Amiga for a little over £300. This brought them within reach of Spectrum owners looking for a viable upgrade path. An alternative option was the Amstrad CPC Plus machines, but by the Nineties who the hell wanted a new 8-bit computer? Just ask MGT.

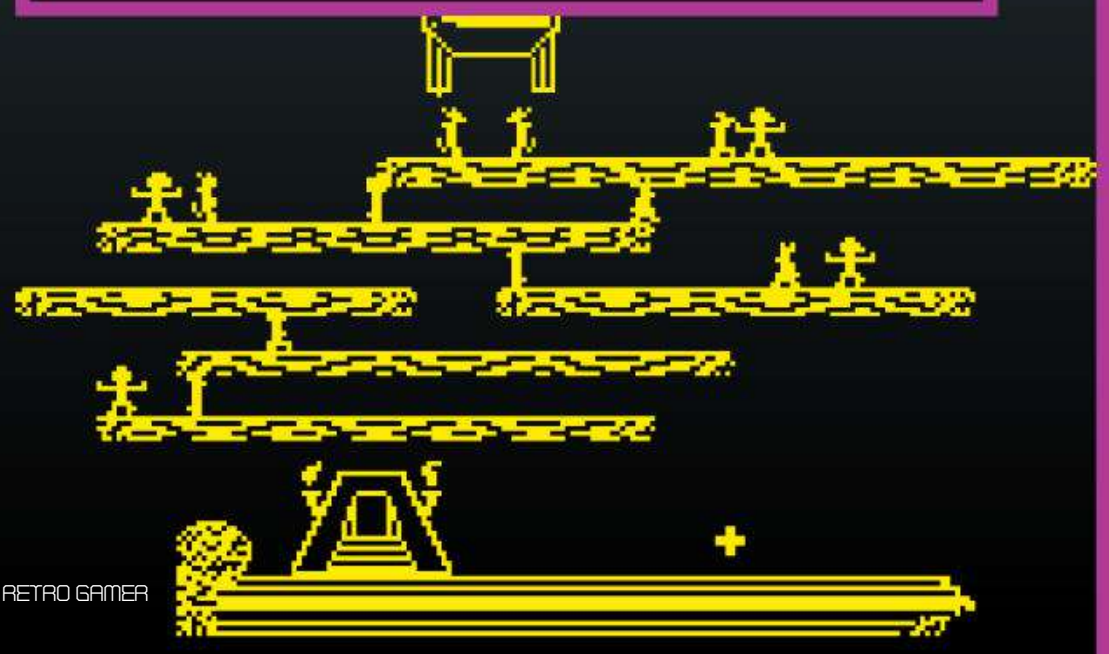
For a while those who stuck with the Spectrum were rewarded with decent versions of popular 16-bit games like *Lemmings*, *North & South* and *Space Crusade*. The latest coin-ops were also converted, but the likes of *G-LOC*, *Final Fight* and *Street Fighter II* were clearly too much for the poor hardware to handle. In April 1992 Amstrad announced that it had ceased manufacturing the Spectrum. And so after precisely ten years as a going concern, during which more than five million units were sold, the production lines finally stopped.

Software support followed suit. Ocean, US Gold, Domark and Elite dropped the Spectrum by 1993, and only the budget publishers and indie developers continued to put out games. This meant that the mags had very little to review and *Sinclair User* closed its doors in March 1993 (having swallowed up *Crash* the previous year). *Your Sinclair* lasted a little longer, until August 1993, when the team signed off with a celebratory 'Big Final Issue'. However, it was the penultimate issue that opened the eyes of readers who were still clinging onto their Speccys. In it, Simon N Goodwin lifted the lid on emulators, explaining how you could actually run Spectrum games on a PC, Amiga and ST. Postal addresses and bulletin boards where you could get these emulator things were listed. The Spectrum's commercial life was over, but the vast library of games would live on, whether you played them on real hardware or emulated them.

Key to keeping the legacy alive was the World Of Spectrum website, which was launched in November 1995 by Martijn van der Heide. This repository of Spectrum-related material, including original software, emulators, books and magazines, would quickly develop into one of the finest computing resources on the internet. The forum became a focal point for the fan community and regular site updates would fill gaps in the archive as well as share details of the new hobbyist/homebrew games and demos that continued to be released as the new millennium approached.

CHIP OFF THE BLOC

The Spectrum, or at least unofficial clones of it, was extremely popular in the Eastern Bloc. As such, there was strong demand for new software in these countries and commercial releases continued throughout the Nineties. *Dizzy* clones were popular, but there were a number of innovative titles released too. Of special interest are the 1995 point-and-click adventure *Twilight* from Ultrasoft (pictured) and the 1997 real-time strategy game *Black Raven* from Copper Feet.



» [ZX Spectrum] Budget publishers like Codemasters continued to support the Spectrum well into the Nineties.

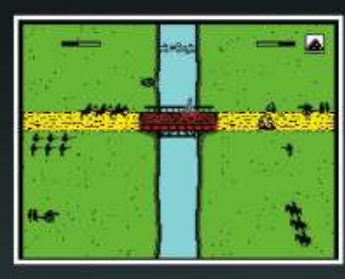
» [ZX Spectrum] Ocean's last ever Spectrum release was, you guessed it, a film licence – *The Addams Family.*

"THE SPECTRUM'S COMMERCIAL LIFE WAS OVER, BUT THE VAST LIBRARY OF GAMES WOULD LIVE ON"

DEFINING GAMES

NORTH & SOUTH

PUBLISHER: INFOGRAMES
DEVELOPER: NEW FRONTIER
HIGHEST SCORE: 96% (CRASH)
YEAR: 1991



This 16-bit hit translated really well to the Spectrum, with one caveat – you had to play it on disk. On tape you were forever loading in the different sections (and the train robbery sequence was missing); on disk it was faultless.

HEROQUEST

PUBLISHER: GREMLIN GRAPHICS
DEVELOPER: GREMLIN GRAPHICS
HIGHEST SCORE: 93% (CRASH)
YEAR: 1991

Based on the 16-bit version, which in turn was based on the popular board game, this was an excellent RPG that you could sink hours into. And if you wanted more, the *Return Of The Witch Lord* expansion also made it the Spectrum.

SMASH TV

PUBLISHER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: PROBE SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE: 97% (CRASH)
YEAR: 1991

Released in late 1991, this was one of the final big releases from Ocean, and it certainly wasn't a token effort. Featuring nice chunky sprites, copious amounts of colour and relentless action from the get-go, it did justice to the wild coin-op.

LEMMINGS

PUBLISHER: PSYGNOSIS
DEVELOPER: PSYGNOSIS
HIGHEST SCORE: 91% (YOUR SINCLAIR)
YEAR: 1991

This cutesy save-'em-up was ported to every viable platform under the sun and the Spectrum was not overlooked. Our version was monochrome and lacked mouse support, but it was basically *Lemmings* and what was not to love about that?

PRINCE OF PERSIA

PUBLISHER: MAGIC SOFT
DEVELOPER: REVELATION
HIGHEST SCORE: N/A
YEAR: 1996

Originally developed in 1993 by the team behind the impressive SAM Coupe version, it failed to find a publisher – only for the game to surface in Russia in 1996 as a commercial release. We don't know how that happened but we're happy it did.

"THE HEADLINE EVENT IN RECENT YEARS HAS BEEN THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SPECTRUM NEXT"

2000+

The early Noughties were a lean time in the Spectrum world with very few new games of note. Standout titles included the Russian-developed titles *Existenz* (2000), *Abe's Mission: Escape* (2002) and *Fire 'N Ice* (2003). Keeping up the British end was Jonathan Cauldwell, a programmer who'd previously written games that had appeared on magazine covertapes. He returned to the Spectrum scene and worked up a number of wonderful homebrew titles including *Egghead In Space* (2002), *Fun Park* (2004) and *GamesX* (2006). Fellow Brit Bob Smith was another prolific programmer, writing *Stranded* (2005), *Farmer Jack* (2006) and *splATTR* (2008). Many of Jonathan and Bob's games would receive physical releases by Cronosoft, an 8-bit publishing label established in 2002 by Simon Ullyatt.

Perhaps Jonathan's most important release was Arcade Game Designer. This free game-creation tool debuted in 2008 and has since provided the foundation for numerous Spectrum games. Another tool, La Churrera from Spain's Mojon Twins, has also bolstered the quantity and quality of new releases in recent years. Elsewhere programmers have used their mastery of Z80 assembler to create stunning-looking releases that would have gob-smacked people back in the Eighties. Special mention must be given to games like *Dreamwalker* (2014), *Stormfinch* (2015) and *Snake Escape* (2016) which use Einar Saukas' Nirvana Engine to display up to eight colours per character square rather than the usual two colours.

Of course the headline event in recent years has been the introduction of the Spectrum Next. This Sinclair-branded machine really is a true evolution of the Spectrum, supporting the original software and hardware while introducing enhanced audio and video capabilities. It's just the kind of computer you can imagine Sinclair or Amstrad might have made had they meaningfully upgraded the hardware. So in the end fans got the 'Super Spectrum' they wanted – they just had to wait 30+ years for it to arrive (and slightly longer still for those backers of the second Kickstarter campaign).

In a nice full-circle move, the Next team called on Rick Dickinson, the designer of every Spectrum model produced by Sinclair, to design the computer's external casing. Rick sadly died in April 2018, and the community suffered another huge loss in September 2021 when news reached us that Sir Clive had passed away. Sir Clive rarely reflected on the Spectrum, preferring instead to focus on his latest project, his next invention, but he surely would have been proud to see his computer command so much love and respect 40 years after it launched. Who knows what will happen over the next ten years but it will certainly involve new hardware, new software and new stories.

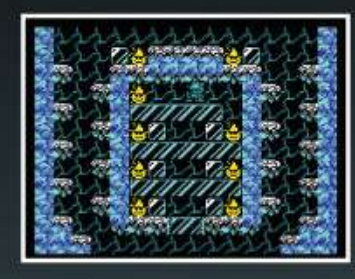
SPECTRUM TURNS 30

■ In April 2012 fans from around Europe converged in Cambridge to celebrate the Spectrum's 30th anniversary. MJ Hibbert kicked off the show in style with a live performance of his Spectrum ode *Hey Hey 16K* and several celebs were in attendance including Spectrum designer Rick Dickinson (pictured) and *Football Manager* creator Kevin Toms. The weekend also included tours of the old Sinclair building. A show to celebrate the 40th anniversary will take place in April 2022.

DEFINING GAMES

FIRE 'N' ICE

PUBLISHER: N-DISCOVERY
DEVELOPER: N-DISCOVERY
HIGHEST SCORE: N/A
YEAR: 2003



■ The NES-only sequel to *Solomon's Key* was converted to the Spectrum in 2003 and it was one of the first titles to really draw attention to the growing homebrew scene. The presentation throughout is excellent with playability to match.

SPECCY BROS

PUBLISHER: CLIMACUS
DEVELOPER: CLIMACUS
HIGHEST SCORE: N/A
YEAR: 2012

■ In 1991 *C&VG* announced that Toaplan's *Snow Bros* was Spectrum-bound. It never arrived, but in 2012 this excellent homebrew version did appear. Apart from being single-player only, it's even more fun than lobbing snowballs in real life.

METAL MAN REMIXED

PUBLISHER: OLEG ORIGIN
DEVELOPER: OLEG ORIGIN
HIGHEST SCORE: N/A
YEAR: 2015

■ This impressive shooter is one of the most technically advanced and visually arresting titles to ever grace the Spectrum (particularly in its final *Remixed* form). In a parallel universe you can imagine Ocean releasing this as *RoboCop 8*.

CASTLEVANIA: SPECTRAL INTERLUDE

PUBLISHER: REWIND TEAM
DEVELOPER: REWIND TEAM
HIGHEST SCORE: N/A
YEAR: 2015

■ *Castlevania* on the Spectrum sounds like a stretch, yet in 2015 the Rewind team delivered a stunning appropriation that features more than 150 screens to explore and 10 enemy types to whip into next week. One of the best homebrews ever made.

WONDERFUL DIZZY

PUBLISHER: TEAM YOLKFOLK
DEVELOPER: TEAM YOLKFOLK
HIGHEST SCORE: N/A
YEAR: 2020

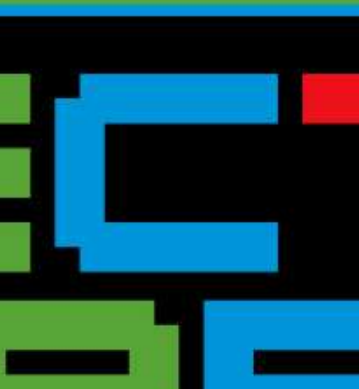
■ There was some commotion when it was revealed that this wasn't exclusive to the Next, but when it looks this good, who cares? If you've missed *Dizzy* then you'll be bowled over by this 2020 adventure. It's (what else) absolutely brilliant!

SPECTRUM FOREVER

MEET THE PASSIONATE INDIVIDUALS THAT ARE STILL KEEPING THE SPECTRUM ALIVE AND WELL

MARK HOWLETT [AKA LORD ARSE]

SPECTRUM SUPERFAN MARK HAS BEEN A SPECCY ADDICT SINCE 1984



"My first Spectrum was the good ol' rubber 48K. I got it as a Christmas present way back in 1984 from my parents. There were so many great games for the Speccy, it's hard to only pick a few favourites, like Matthew Smith's superb *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*. I must have spent weeks just seeing how far I could travel in that mansion. And *The Lords of Midnight* – not just a technical marvel but a wonderful adventure/strategy game to boot. I still regard this as one of the best computer games of all time. It's not difficult to see why the Spectrum was so important in the history of the British gaming industry. It's still popular today because it was such a formative part of so many of our lives growing up, and thanks to a large online community, we can still reminisce about the good old days when life was simple and we could come home from school and load up *Skool Daze*! And because there's still so much of an interest, people are still producing fanzines, games, hardware, even brand-new models."

EINAR SAUKAS

BRAZILIAN DEVELOPER OF THE ZXDB, A DATABASE OF EVERY SPECTRUM GAME

"My first Spectrum was a Brazilian clone called TK90X. It was a dream machine to program: simple yet powerful (for its price) and extremely flexible. Moreover, the available games had such creativity and variety that it explains the Spectrum's popularity even nowadays. This computer had a profound influence on my life, leading me to graduate in both electronic engineering and computer science and follow a career in IT consulting. Then I created ZXDB, intended to be just a week's effort. In 2013, the main Spectrum site at the time stopped updating when its founder left. I was so worried that decades of information could be lost, that I designed ZXDB as an open, free database for everyone. I never intended to continue afterwards but it snowballed into such a large community project that I had to keep it going. Nowadays ZXDB is integrated or used by every major Spectrum site, supported by many applications, emulators and even chatbots, accessible from Spectrum Next to Apple TV. Who could imagine?"

KIM JUSTICE

YOUTUBER KIM HAS BEEN CREATING FANTASTIC VIDEOS ON THE ZX SPECTRUM FOR MANY YEARS

"My first Spectrum was one of the later ones: a +2a. It was bought by my parents from an old Tandy shop in about 1990 and I think they hoped I'd use it to learn coding or something like that. Naturally, that didn't happen! I have a few favourites: *Deathchase* always stands out as it's one of the first games I ever played, and you just can't beat the feeling of riding a bike through a forest in glorious 16K. As to the Spectrum's success... I reckon that the affordability had a lot to do with it. In a time when most computers were quite expensive, Sinclair came out with a computer that was, relatively speaking, very cheap indeed. Sure, there were compromises and the build quality certainly wasn't the best, but it got momentum, and from there the software gave the system its idiosyncratic personality and identity. Sir Clive may not have been particularly big on the gaming side of the machine, but it's hard to contemplate a UK gaming industry or even a market, without its existence."

MEV DINC

SPECTRUM DEVELOPER IN THE EIGHTIES BEHIND GAMES SUCH AS LAST NINJA 2 AND ALIENS

"The beloved Speccy certainly changed my life and as such it holds a special place in my heart. I learned all about game development on this little wonder computer. The ZX Spectrum was a pioneering machine of the early days. It offered no fancy hardware sprites or a sound chip, but its limitations provided us with unlimited ways to push its spec to the limit. As a result, there were some truly great games created with it such as *Ant Attack*, *Knight Lore*, *Enduro Racer*, *Horace Goes Skiing* and *Cybernoid* to name but a few. I learned machine code programming and thoroughly enjoyed working on it. I guess, my finest programming achievement on the Speccy has to be *Last Ninja 2*."

PHIL 'SNOUTY' SOUTH

GAMES JOURNALIST FOR THE SKILLO SPECTRUM MAG, YOUR SINCLAIR

"I bought my original Spectrum 48K from Boots in Hemel Hempstead in 1983. Initially, my favourite games were the games I had, *Jetpac*, *Pssst*, *Manic Miner*, *Ant Attack*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lords Of Midnight*. Later on, when I started working for magazines and got all my games for free I had too many favourites to count, but the ones that stuck in my mind were *The Sentinel* (which I often say is my favourite all-time game on any platform), *Tir Na Nog*, *Trap Door*, *Jet Set Willy* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Working at *Your Sinclair* was about as much fun as you would expect x1000. Marcus [Berkmann], Teresa [Maughan] and I were the original Scooby Gang and got to sit about making jokes all day while playing games, drinking lunchtime and evening, writing for a living and getting PAID while doing so. As to the Speccy, it delivered the promise of computer gaming to a huge chunk of the population who couldn't otherwise afford the price of entry. It was a democratising piece of tech, allowing any kid with half a brain cell to play and better yet WRITE credible games. It's the true start, at least in the UK, of the videogame revolution and its tentacles wind through all the dark crevices of the industry even 40 years later."

JAMES O'BRIEN

JOURNALIST AND BROADCASTER

"My mate Tim got a ZX81, that was the gateway computer. I was saving up for the ZX81 when the Spectrum came out and I had to have one. I still wish I'd stuck with an early enthusiasm for programming but I mostly remember feeling that you could have a whole arcade in your bedroom and wondering how on Earth people could afford to buy more than a game or two a year. Favourite games? It's hard to narrow it down but *Jet Set Willy*, obviously, and *Horace Goes Skiing*. A game called *The Secret Of St Brides* blew me away and Domark's *Eureka!*, which had a £25,000 prize I got quite close to winning, was amazing. I've tried to play some of them since and can't believe how patient we must have been at the time. When I'd got really into adventures I sent a list of the ones I'd completed to *Sinclair User* offering to help people in return for 20p and an SAE – it was a regular feature I wasn't being weird. I called myself the 'Perambulin Goblin' which sounded suitably Tolkeinish and, to this, day if you Google that you'll find a PDF of the mag and my old address! As for the Spectrum, apart from those multiple-choice adventure books and the clunky consoles, it was the first thing we could do that was truly interactive. Communicating with a machine, taking part in stories. It was next level."

TIM FOLLIN

SPECTRUM SOUND AND MUSIC ENGINEER – BEFORE THAT JOB TITLE EXISTED!

"I first saw a Spectrum and *Manic Miner* at my cousin's and was immediately sold – I knew I had to have one! However it was my older brother Mike who first bought one, I was about 13 at the time and remember just staring at the screen and watching everything he did. I got my Spectrum the following year and spent Christmas day playing *Knight Lore*. I loved the fact that it made a colourful image on a TV – that doesn't sound like much but at the time the only things you ever saw on a TV were TV programmes, so the idea of being able to create bright and colourful images on a TV was itself novel. The Spectrum was the cheapest colour home computer on the market and there were already hundreds of games available for it by the mid-Eighties – I would have chosen the Spectrum over everything else purely for the games available, so the fact that it was also the cheapest colour computer on the market made it a no-brainer. To be honest, at first, I didn't pay that much attention to the sound. I knew it was simple and had clearly been a very low priority for the computer's designers, but it was only when I started to experiment with Z80 machine code that I realised how the 'beep' sound was being created, which led me to start experimenting with alternative ways to generate audio. It was completely instrumental in kick-starting my whole career!"

ROGER KEAN

EDITOR, CRASH MAGAZINE

"Franco Frey brought a 16K Spectrum to Ludlow one weekend. We plugged it in, loaded up some *Defender* clone and it knocked us out. Of course, the graphics were simple, but there was no denying the excitement of seeing interaction on your own telly rather than in the arcades. It was popular for several factors: price, especially when compared to other platforms, and the relatively low cost of the games. I believe the quality and the imagination of the gameplay also captured owners' hearts and easily matched what was available elsewhere. Oddly, the rivalry between the Commodore 64 and Spectrum probably helped as well."

James O'Brien image © Roger Green

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INSIDE THE EGRET II

THE MINIATURE ARCADE MARKET IS GETTING INCREASINGLY OVERCROWDED AND NOW TAITO IS THROWING ITS HAT INTO THE RING WITH THE EGRET II MINI. THE MACHINE'S PRODUCER, TETSUO EGAWA EXPLAINS HOW TAITO'S MINIATURE CAB PLANS TO PULL AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION TO FULFIL A RICH ARCADE HERITAGE

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

Back in the Eighties and Nineties, arcade developers were constantly pushing boundaries, whether it was in the development of new genres, or the pushing of constantly exciting hardware. While the arcade scene is very different to what it was like during its halcyon days, companies like SNK and Sega are still revisiting those glory years with miniature systems like the Neo Geo Mini and the Astro City Mini.

While both consoles certainly come with their fair share of strengths and weaknesses, they both do a tremendous job of highlighting the diverse libraries of both studios, with SNK's Neo Geo Mini featuring as many as 48 games (depending on which version you own) and Sega's Astro City Mini delivering 37 arcade classics. The latest arcade heavyweight to enter the ring is Taito, which recently released its Egret II Mini in Japan and hopes to establish it as the definitive miniature arcade machine of choice.

If you're not keen on importing from overseas you'll be pleased to know that a limited number of systems with distinctive blue buttons (rather than the pink of the Japanese release) are currently available to buy in the West via ININ Games and Strictly Limited Games and they cater to all – from those who are just happy to own the unit itself to those that want to fully immerse themselves in Taito lore, thanks to numerous extras like books, CDs, flyers and stickers. As we revealed in issue 231's hands-on review, the Egret II Mini certainly isn't cheap, but it's a quality bit of kit and an incredible way to experience the diverse library of one of Japan's oldest arcade operators.

Founded in 1953 by Ukrainian entrepreneur Michael Kogan, Taito dabbled in numerous

MINI

» [Egret II Mini] *The Ninja Kids* allowed four players to fight together in arcades. The Egret II Mini caters for two players only.

products in its early days, including vodka and vending machines, before releasing electro-mechanical games in the late-Sixties. Success with releases such as *Crown Soccer Special*, *Super Road 7* and *Sky Fighter* led to Taito producing arcade videogames, including *Soccer*, *Astro Race*, *David Cup* and *Elepong*. By the time *Space Invaders* arrived in 1978, the company had already produced a huge number of arcade games, but it was its sci-fi hit that it became synonymous with and it's no surprise to find it sitting proudly at the top of Taito's new unit when you first switch it on.

This mentioning of Taito's past is important, because while its earlier games don't appear on Taito's machine – many appear to be currently unemulatable – its creators were adamant that the Egret II Mini would still serve as a way to encapsulate the sheer diversity and breadth of the company's rich output. As a result the Egret II Mini kicks off with the aforementioned 1978 classic and ends with *Bubble Memories*, which Taito released in Japanese arcades in 1995. That's nearly 30 years of arcade history in a single unit and it's a great way to get a better understanding of where Taito was in the arcade space during that time. "We wanted to show the changes in the history of arcade games through Taito's games, so that people could experience that history with this product," explains Tetsuo Egawa, the producer behind the Egret II Mini.

It's a rich, varied history that Egawa and his team have captured and the 40-game library delivers a number of well-loved classics like *Bubble Bubble*, *Rastan Saga* and *The New Zealand Story* as well as deeper cuts like *The Ninja Kids*, *Gun Frontier*, *Raimais* and *Dan Ku Ga*, which is a particularly interesting inclusion as it was a planned upgrade for *Kaiser Knuckle* (which is also included) that never made its projected 1994 release date.

> **WE WANTED TO SHOW THE CHANGES IN THE HISTORY OF ARCADE GAMES THROUGH TAITO'S GAMES**
>
> TETSUO EGAWA

When you're archiving for a company that has so many games that are beloved by so many, how do you even go about choosing what titles are worthy of making the cut? "Well of course we wanted titles that would please users, but the project members also have a strong love for Taito, so we shared our opinions and made our selections," continues Egawa. "We chose titles that best represent Taito."

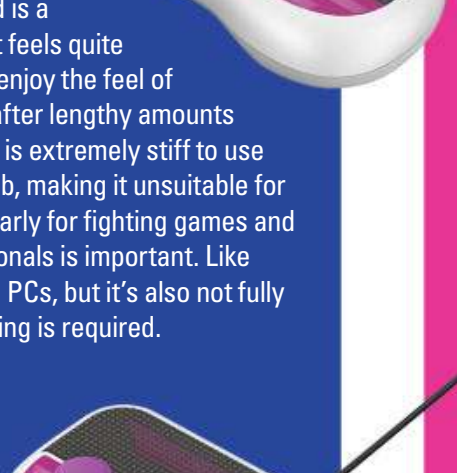
That representation is easy to see, but what is also apparent from using the Egret II Mini is just how much love the team has for the games. You can see it via the system's excellent presentation. Switch the machine on and you'll be treated to one of three jaunty tunes that play as you traverse the menu. An Egret II cabinet is displayed on the left-hand side of the game's impressive 5-inch screen, while games are presented on the right. Selecting a game not only tells you when it was released, but also how many players it caters for, its genre and what arcade board it was released on. You can also instantly see at a glance how many save states have been used for a game (each title supports three).

PERIPHERAL POWER

WE PLAY TEST ALL THREE CONTROLLERS FOR TAITO'S SYSTEM

CONTROL PANEL

COST: €89.99



There's no doubt that this is an expensive piece of kit, but we'd argue that it's worth it if you're planning to seriously hammer the Egret II Mini. Unlike the main unit, the Control Panel features full-size buttons that feel very nice to use. While the stick does have the same shaft as the main unit it does feature a bigger ball head. It supports 4-way and 8-way controls (via a switch on its base) and it's surprisingly weighty with underside grips that will keep it firmly in place if used on a table. It's certainly not cheap but you can feel its quality.

CONTROL PAD

COST: €34.99

Considering the overall build quality of the system and the other available controllers, the Control Pad is a little disappointing. While it feels quite nice in the hand, we didn't enjoy the feel of its small concave buttons after lengthy amounts of play. The included d-pad is extremely stiff to use and also tough on the thumb, making it unsuitable for long play sessions, particularly for fighting games and shmups where hitting diagonals is important. Like the Control Pad it works on PCs, but it's also not fully compatible, so some tinkering is required.

PADDLE & TRACKBALL GAME EXPANSION SET

COST: €119: 99

Unlike the other peripherals featured here, this device comes with an SD card that includes ten games, going a good way to justifying its higher cost. Both the trackball and paddle feel very sturdy while the device itself is well-made and is the same size as the Control Panel. There are grips on the device's base to hold it in place, but we had no issues using it on our laps. While our PC recognised it, we couldn't get it working with any trackball or paddle games in MAME. Overall it's a solid companion to the base unit, if you can afford it.

THE COMPETITION

HOW DOES THE EGRET II COMPARE WITH ITS RIVALS?

NEO GEO MINI

PRICE:	£79.99
NUMBER OF GAMES:	40
SCANLINES:	NO
OUTPUT:	720P
SAVES PER GAME:	4

CAPCOM HOME ARCADE

PRICE:	£199.99
NUMBER OF GAMES:	16
SCANLINES:	YES
OUTPUT:	1080P
SAVES PER GAME:	3

ASTRO CITY MINI

PRICE:	£129.99
NUMBER OF GAMES:	37
SCANLINES:	YES
OUTPUT:	720P
SAVES PER GAME:	2

EGRET II MINI

PRICE:	€199.99
NUMBER OF GAMES:	40
SCANLINES:	NO
OUTPUT:	720P
SAVES PER GAME:	3

Go into the console's settings and you'll be presented with additional options that include altering the volume and brightness (you can up both to 5 but we wouldn't recommend it for volume, as it sounds a bit tinny). There's also a filter – highly recommended as the system's default option is blurry to say the least – language settings – English, Japanese, simplified Chinese and traditional Chinese – as well as the option to turn off and extend demo settings. It lacks the ability to properly scale all games (meaning you'll see shimmering on certain titles, depending on their original resolutions) and the lack of options for using scanlines is quite disappointing, but there's no denying that a lot of attention has gone into the Egret II Mini.

t's most noticeable when you look at the unit itself which is exceptionally sturdy and has good responsive micro-switched buttons, as well as a micro-switched joystick which can be altered for either 8-way or 4-way play via a switch on the bottom of the cabinet. Those with bigger hands may find the space between the stick and the screen to be a little snug, but we experienced no such problems. Egawa wouldn't confirm if the unit or its peripherals were using arcade components, but they do appear to be of high quality, with only the Control Pad (available separately) disappointing us.

For many of you, the main draw of Taito's miniature cabinet is arguably what many see as the system's trump card over its peers – a 5-inch screen which not only outperforms its contemporaries in terms of image quality, but can also be rotated, allowing it to easily play both horizontal games as well as those of the vertical TATE orientation. The screen of the Egret II Mini not only serves as a tremendous selling point, but was also another way of subtly highlighting Taito's long-running legacy. "Especially in the early days of arcade games and shooting games, vertical screens were the norm," explains Egawa. "As arcade games were ported to home consoles the number of games using horizontal screens increased with the times. We wanted to show the changes in the history of arcade games through Taito's games, so that people could experience that history with this product."

You experience that history in a very tactile way. As we mentioned in our review, the Egret II Mini's lavish screen is an absolute joy to play around with because the mechanical components that power it make it so satisfying to use. Pushing down onto the screen causes it to spring clear of the unit by a good inch. You then simply rotate the screen through 90-degrees until it locks into place (you'll hear a lovely satisfying clunk). Once secured, pushing down on the screen resets the on-screen image, allowing you to tackle vertical shmups like *Tatsujin* and *Halley's Comet*, or more traditional horizontal affairs like *Don Doko Don* and *The Fairyland Story*. It's an exceptionally impressive piece of engineering and it clearly wasn't a cheap solution but it was a crucial thing to achieve if Egawa and his team was to truly replicate the original Egret II arcade cabinet (which also allowed you to rotate its screen). "It was not easy to think

» [Egret II Mini] It's not the prettiest of games, but *Gun Frontier* is a solid shmup with a distinctive theme.

of and realise a simple and easy way to rotate the monitor," admits Egawa. A solution was eventually found and if you look into the system's innards when the screen is detached you can see the huge spring that is central to the system's unique monitor. As far as Egawa was concerned, the Egret II Mini *had* to have that rotatable screen. "In order for people to experience the changes in the history of arcade games through Taito's games, it was inevitable that they would have to rotate their monitors to play vertical games and horizontal games."

> **IT WAS NOT EASY TO THINK OF AND REALISE A SIMPLE AND EASY WAY TO ROTATE THE MONITOR**
> TETSUO EGAWA

While Egawa and his team did come up with a way of solving the multi-screen capabilities of the Egret II Mini, it has resulted in a unit that is much pricier than its peers. Regardless of whether you pick up a unit with more traditional pink fire buttons from Japan or grab the Western equivalent from ININ Games or Strictly Limited Games you're going to notice the price difference. While we feel the base unit price of €199.99 is ultimately fair for the high production value of the unit and the large amount of games it's still pricey, with only Koch's Capcom Home Arcade costing more on release (although admittedly it used proper arcade components and outputted at 1080p, which added to the overall cost). Sega's Astro City Mini currently comes in at £129.99 while the base Neo Geo Mini from SNK costs £79.99 making Taito's unit roughly £35 more expensive than Sega's system and significantly more costlier than SNK's alternative.

Egawa feels the price is justified when you consider the lengths that Taito has gone to in order to ensure the system is as faithful as possible to the arcade cabinet it is based on. "The monitor is a 5-inch LCD with a 4:3 aspect ratio that was specially made for this product," he offers. "The joystick has been redesigned many times to make it feel more like the arcade. In addition, there is an SD card slot to add more games, and a rotation mechanism, which is the main selling point of the console, and it contains 40 titles. In fact, we're offering it at a rather low price to our customers…"

The SD card slot Egawa mentions is yet another aspect of the Egret II Mini that sets it apart from its peers. If you buy Taito's Paddle & Trackball Game Expansion Set you'll also receive a ten-game bundle that includes *Arkanoid*, *Arkanoid Returns*, *Arkanoid: Revenge Of Doh*, *Birdie King*, *Cameltry*, *Marine Date*, *Plump Pop*, *Puchi Carat*, *Strike Bowling* and *Syvalion*. It's a diverse and eclectic selection of titles designed to make full use of the expensive peripheral. (Just be mindful that you can't access any of the existing games when playing the SD card-based games.) More exciting news is that Egawa suggests this won't be the only collection of games to appear on an SD card, telling us, "This is a feature that will allow you to continue playing on the Egret II Mini in the future, so look forward to it!"

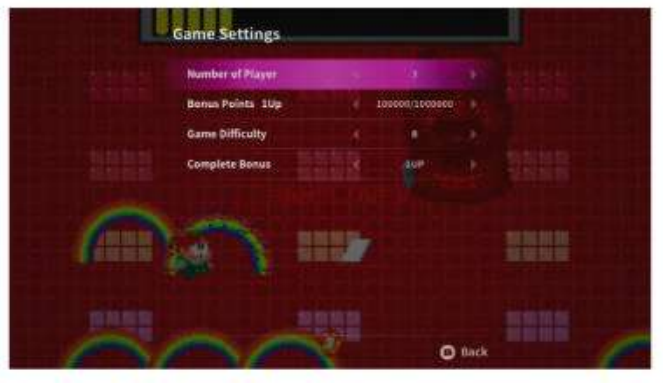
Of course, when you look at the history of previous mini consoles clever hackers have found numerous ways to exploit the USB ports of these systems, so we can only imagine the challenge they'll see knowing the Egret II Mini features an actual SD card slot beyond the usual USB ports that are typically exploited. Egawa doesn't seem too concerned about potential piracy though, seeing the slot as an important way of increasing the lifespan of Taito's system. "The SD card has special processing against creating a copy," he tells us. "So if you create a pirate edition and the main unit [Egret II Mini] breaks down, this is your own risk [laughs]."

If piracy does prove to be as difficult as Egawa hopes there are more than enough games to keep the average gamer busy and that's before you even consider the ten additional titles that are included with the *Paddle & Trackball Game Expansion Set*. This expansion peripheral is costly but it's an extremely well-designed piece of

» The Egret's 5-inch rotating screen is an exceptional feature, giving it the edge over similar systems.

» [Egret II Mini] When we used our TV to power the device it crashed completely while playing *Darius Gaiden* and did this. Make sure you're getting the right amount of power to the system to avoid similar issues.

» [Egret II Mini] *Rainbow Islands Extra* will disappoint those wanting the original, but it's still a great game.



» [Egret II Mini] Every game has individual dip switch settings, but you won't find any options to turn their Japanese language to English.

» [Egret II Mini] The system's standard output is surprisingly soft and fuzzy (above). Luckily, you can switch a filter on (below) which makes things much sharper.

» [Egret II Mini] *Dan Ku Ga* was never released in arcades, so its inclusion here is lovely to see.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

MAKE SURE YOU PLAY THESE GEMS FIRST

LUNAR RESCUE

RELEASE: 1979

■ This is one of the earliest releases on the machine and it holds up incredibly well. You're initially tasked with dropping down to the moon's surface to retrieve stranded astronauts, dodging asteroids as you go. Once you have an astronaut aboard it's simply a case of shooting down the enemy ships that have gathered and getting your astronaut to safety so you can begin the task all over again. It's a slick cross between Taito's own *Space Invaders* and Atari's *Lunar Lander*.

OUTER ZONE

RELEASE: 1984

■ Like *Adventure Canoe*, *Outer Zone* isn't supported on MAME, suggesting it's been painstakingly included for some unknown reason. It's an interesting isometric offering, combining the intricate maze ways of *Crystal Castles* with deliberate blasting as you attempt to knock out enemy installations, while avoiding the many robots that track you down. It's arguably the weakest game we're mentioning here, but as it's seemingly unplayable anywhere else it warrants inclusion.

BUBBLE BUBBLE

RELEASE: 1986

■ While Taito's game is mechanically simple, it's filled with all manner of secrets that will elude all but the most hardcore of players. It's a wondrous fusion of colourful visuals and easy-to-grasp gameplay melded to a ridiculously catchy tune and it's fantastic fun on your own or with a friend. The franchise is still going strong today and it's no surprise that the Egret II Mini features four other games from the series: *Rainbow Islands*, *Bubble Memories*, *Bubble Symphony* and *Puzzle Bubble 2X*.

HAT TRICK HERO

RELEASE: 1990

■ If you've played arcade games like *Super Sidekicks* you'll be right at home with *Hat Trick Hero*. It's a blisteringly fast footy game with slick animation, solid mechanics and a surprising amount of humour. There's a good amount of violence in Taito's game as well and you'll get away with nasty slides and shirt pulling if you're far enough away from the ref. It's challenging, but its real success is that it is one of the better two-player games available on the system.

ELEVATOR ACTION RETURNS

RELEASE: 1994

■ While the original *Elevator Action* is also included, the sequel ramps things up significantly. Like the original game, you're tasked with defusing bombs by going behind certain doors to deactivate them, avoiding enemies as you go. Unlike the original game you're not just confined to exploring skyscrapers – your quest takes you to an airport, sewers and other locations – and you get to play co-operatively with a friend. The end result is a brilliant frenzied action game.

RAYFORCE

RELEASE: 1994

■ Taito's excellent vertical shooter is known by all manner of names, including *Layer Section*, *Galactic Attack* and *Gunlock*. Regardless of its moniker, it remains a truly satisfying shmup with brilliant mechanics – your ship's main weapon is a powerful lock-on laser that can target multiple enemies that are on a lower plane to your fighter – a thumping soundtrack and some truly memorable boss fights. While none of the game's later sequels are included, this is our favourite, so that's more than fine.

» [Egret II Mini] If you can justify the extra cost, the spinner peripheral makes games like *Cameltry* shine.

» On the back you'll find two USB ports, a HDMI connection, a USB-C port for charging and a headphone socket.

TATSUJIN

RELEASE: 1988

This classic shoot-'em-up is an interesting addition to the Egret II Mini as it's one of two Toaplan shooters that have been included (the other being the excellent *Kyukyoku Tiger*). *Tatsujin* is a truly exceptional blaster that's low on frills (only three different weapons are available) but high on thrills as you blast your way through relentless waves of enemies and some truly challenging bosses across its five stages. It's known as *Truxton* in the West.

MIZUBAKU ADVENTURE

RELEASE: 1990

Known as *Liquid Kids* outside of Japan, *Mizubaku Adventure* is an entertaining side-scrolling platformer with a distinctive watery theme. Your hero Hipopo can carry around globs of water that freeze any enemies they're broken against for a limited time. The physics in the game mean spilled water can reach additional enemies, which can all be destroyed for bonus points. It's a simple but slick scoring system that offers plenty of strategy as you battle through each level.

DARIUS GAIDEN

RELEASE: 1994

Many consider this tremendous sequel to be the best 2D instalment in Taito's fishy series and it's hard to argue. The multiple paths, otherworldly music and iconic fish-themed bosses are all present and correct, but *Gaiden* bumps up the carnage by equipping your Silver Hawk fighter with a powerful bomb that sucks in on-screen enemies and it's now possible to take over certain mid-bosses by shooting their energy orbs. If later games arrive on SD card like Egawa has mentioned, we'd love a *Darius* collection.

AND THE REST...

RELEASE: 1978-1995

Adventure Canoe, Bubble Memories, Bubble Symphony, Cadash, Chack'N Pop, Dan Ku Ga, Don Doko Don, Elevator Action, The Fairyland Story, Gun Frontier, Halley's Comet, Kaiser Knuckle, Kiki Kaikai, Kyukyoku Tiger, The Legend Of Kage, Lupin The Third, Metal Black, The NewZealand Story, The Ninja Kids, Pirate Pete, Puzzle Bubble 2X, Qix, Raimais, Rainbow Islands Extra, Rastan Saga, Runark, Scramble Formation, Space Invaders, Steel Worker, Violence Fight, Volfied.

> WE HAD A LOT OF TROUBLE WITH COPY GUARD PROTECTION WHEN EXTRACTING DATA FROM THE BOARDS
>
> TETSUO EGAWA

kit and came about because Egawa told us, "There are many Taito games that can be played with special controllers. We wanted to include *Arkanoid* and *Cyberion* [*Syvalion*], which have been highly requested for a long time, so we prepared ten titles that could be played with the *Trackball & Paddle Game Expansion Set* in addition to the forty titles that can be played with cabinet controls. In fact, there were many people who said they would play better if they could play with paddles, so we prepared it properly."

Of course when you have so many included games, whether they're on the unit itself or packaged with an extra controller, emulation is going to come up and while we've noticed a few very minor inconsistencies (largely with sound on newer titles like *Darius Gaiden*, or when the wrong power supply is used) it's generally proven to be very good indeed.

It has not been easy for Egawa and his team however as he revealed that, "We had a hard time getting all the boards for the games we selected. The next step was to emulate all the different boards in each game." That's quite a task in itself when you consider that the 40 games found on the base system have come from over 20 different arcade boards and it turned out to be a difficult and time-consuming task. "There were many challenges and difficulties," admits Egawa. "We had a lot of trouble with copy guard protection when extracting data from the boards."

For the most part those challenges and difficulties have now been overcome by the team and the end result is arguably the most enticing and polished miniature arcade system we've played. We're obviously very interested in Sega's incoming vertical Astro City Mini cabinet, but that's mainly because we're massive shmup fiends. In the here and now though Taito's unit stands proud due to offering superb build quality, an excellent range of games and very good emulation that very rarely puts a step wrong. Granted, it doesn't have all the scaling and behind-the-scenes options that we'd like to see on a device like this and it's certainly much pricier than its peers, but when you get your hands on it, it's easy to see where the extra money has gone. Egawa believes it's too, saying the Egret II Mini offers "a sense of immersion" that you don't get with similar systems and that immersion was intentional, as it's "designed so that it can be fully enjoyed on the 5-inch LCD monitor of the main unit". The end result is a truly tremendous machine that is as impressive as the rich legacy of the games that powers it.

Special thanks to United Games for supplying our cabinet and the Expansion Set. You can order the base unit and additional peripherals from gamesrocket.com, get collector editions at strictlylimitedgames.com or use your favourite Japanese importer.

Kung-Fu Master

ANYBODY NEED A HUG?

» ARCADE » 1984 » IREM

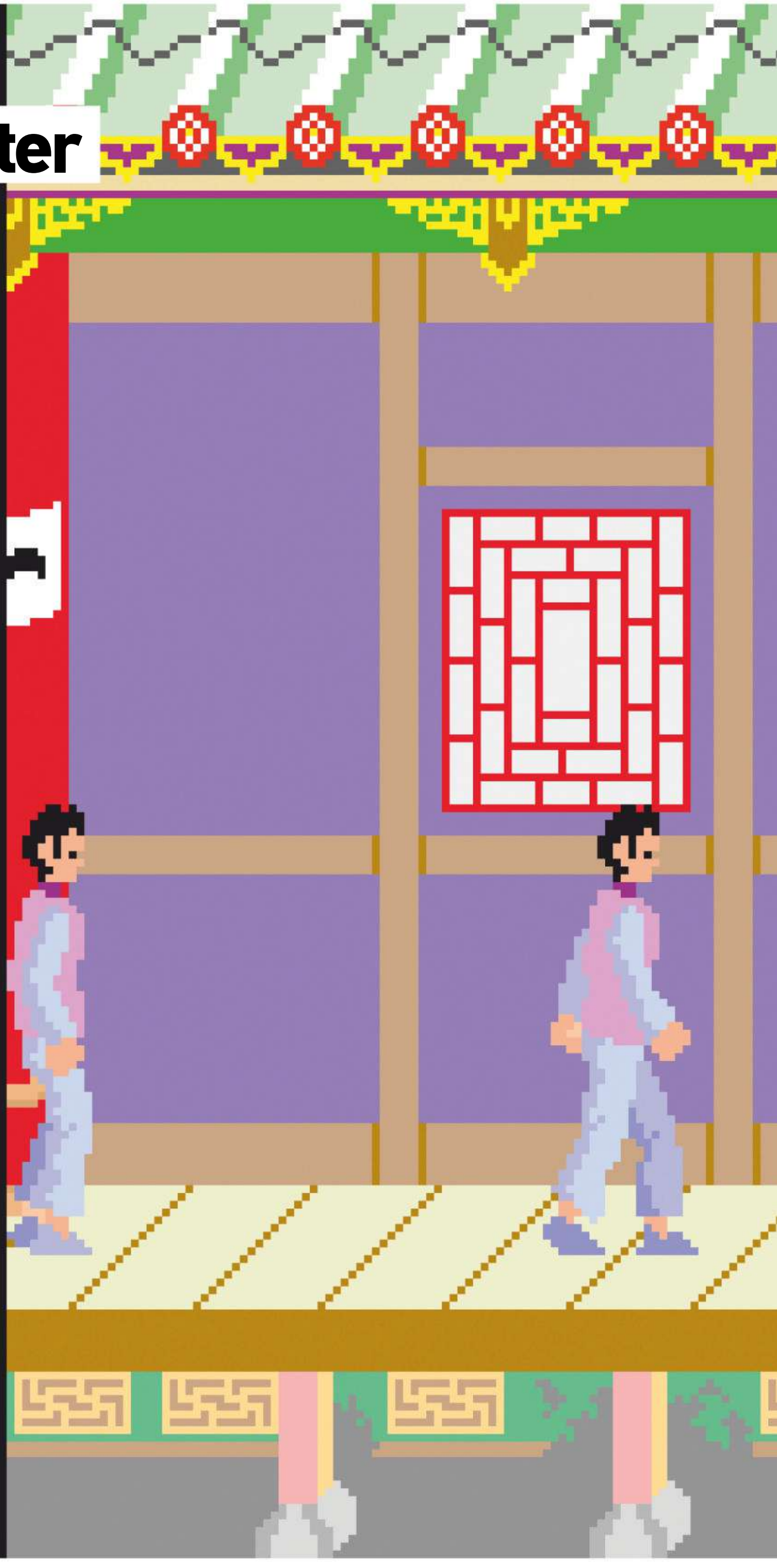
Dave Cook's new book *Go Straight: The Ultimate Guide To Side-Scrolling Beat-'em-ups* recently highlighted the importance of Irem's *Kung-Fu Master* and it made me want to replay the Amstrad CPC version I used to own as a kid. It's a rather competent conversion but obviously isn't a patch on the slick NES version of the game, which was coded by Shigeru Miyamoto no less. Anyway, it wasn't long before I fired up the original arcade hit and it really is an excellent action game that constantly tests your reflexes and introduces you to numerous tropes that would become a hallmark of the genre.

Whether you know Irem's game by its Western moniker or its Japanese name of *Spartan X* (it's a very loose adaptation of the Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung movie of the same name, but has more in common with Bruce Lee's *Game Of Death*) its core gameplay mechanics are unchanged, as is its rather compelling story. As with Nintendo's arcade smash *Donkey Kong*, which rather serendipitously, was coded by Shigeru Miyamoto, *Kung-Fu Master*'s story features the liberation of a fair maiden, in this case, Sylvia. Her boyfriend Thomas has received a letter from Mr X – all revealed via the game's excellent intro – and he heads off to the dangerous multi-floor Devil's Temple in order to retrieve his girl.

Sadly, this rescue attempt is easier said than done because Mr X has an almost unlimited supply of goons who love nothing more than rushing Thomas from all sides so they can hopefully grab the plucky hero and hug the life out of him. Fortunately, Thomas is quick on his feet and can see off his numerous opponents with a swift kick or a quick punch. Kicks and leg sweeps are the safest way of keeping enemies at bay but they don't score as well as punches or jumping kicks, which is something to consider if you like chasing high scores.

As Thomas climbs ever higher through the floors of Mr X's base he encounters new enemies which need new attacks to defeat them and the later stages become a mad, chaotic juggling act as you switch between punches, sweeps and kicks in order to keep the overwhelming forces at bay. There are bosses waiting at the end of each floor (some come equipped with weapons) who also have their own attack patterns to master. Needless to say, poor Thomas has his work cut out.

The success of Irem's game led to numerous home versions, including the two I've already mentioned, and was revisited by Irem many years later in the form of *Vigilante*, which keeps the same plot details, but introduces an urban setting and the use of weapons. But that, dear readers, is a story for another day. ✱



200

Capstone

STUDIO PROFILE

In 1989 the world welcomed a new software house, one seemingly dedicated to low-budget licensed titles, Capstone. But then, in 1993, the company shifted focus to using the latest technology to take advantage of the first-person shooter craze. "The pinnacle of entertainment software" as its slogan went, is mostly remembered today for releasing some of the worst games of the decade. So what went wrong?

WORDS BY DAMIANO GERLI

Before Capstone, there was IntraCorp. Founded in 1984 by Leigh Rothschild, IntraCorp was a software publisher based in Miami (Florida), selling simple low-budget products in various shops by the late-Eighties. Among its employees, there was programmer Rick Leinecker, introduced to IntraCorp in 1985. His first work for the company, he mentions, was *Space Math*, an education title released on Atari ST, but he was also responsible for writing *Murder On The Atlantic*. He has no kind words for the company, "All of the software IntraCorp was publishing back then was total crap, like *Business Card Maker* and *Bumper Sticker Maker*." Then, he recalls, in 1988 Leigh Rothschild managed to obtain the *Trump Castle* licence to develop a series of casino games, thus creating IntraCorp's subsidiary Capstone. Initially it employed mostly external developers, to release as many quick and cheap licensed products as possible.

In 1990 Rick worked on one of the first *Tom Clancy's* videogames, inspired by the novel *The Cardinal Of The Kremlin*. "The work required a lot of research and, as I remember, Clancy wasn't involved at all. I was actually taking this project over from someone who had a parting of the ways with Rothschild." Unfortunately for Rick the game wasn't particularly well-received either, but that hardly mattered since IntraCorp was on a roll and began releasing a number of games. *Miami Vice* was another title which Rick worked on, "Essentially, I would create various scenes based on what I knew about the TV show and, also, because I grew up in Miami," he tells us. "Again, no involvement whatsoever from the licensor." Fortunately, Rick does have good memories of another licensed product, *The Dark Half*, which was based on George A Romero's 1989 film, which was itself an adaptation of Stephen King's novel. "The team that worked on that was pretty good. I think it was one of the few that turned out very well," he says.

Rick later became director of technology, a period he does not remember fondly. "Working at Capstone was very difficult. Towards the end, hiring good people was hard because of the low salary cap, then in staff meetings, they got chewed out for underperforming. So many people came and went." Right before leaving the company, in 1993, Rick mentions that Capstone was starting to shift, trying to hire as many developers as it could.

Leigh Rothschild decided that Capstone needed a change of pace. This is also confirmed by musician Joe Abbati, hired fresh out of school to work on audio, "From what I recall, Capstone was meant to rebrand and create distance from titles like *Home Alone*. It also involved corporate restructuring for our expansion as a developer/publisher." Despite being created years prior, 1993 is the year when Capstone began developing the games that would, later, make it famous as one of the worst developers from the Nineties.

Capstone would focus on bringing to the audience an exciting new genre of games: first-person shooters. Producer Amy Boylan-Smith, hired as director in 1992, worked in the role of executive producer on most of Capstone's titles until the company folded up. Her duties at the company included testing out the products, making decisions and overseeing teams to check that everyone was on track and had everything they needed. "Back then," she recalls, "the company was growing, they had just transferred into a new building after Hurricane Andrew hit".

Rafael Paiz was among the first programmers to be recruited to work on the new titles, which he recalls as an exciting time. Capstone also got its hands on some of

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Capstone
BradyGAMES
INTRACORP

» [PC] *William Shatner's TekWar* was notable at the time of release as it was one of the first games to use the popular Build engine.

» [PC] Capstone published a number of licensed games, including one based on *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*.

» [PC] The credits for *Corridor 7: Alien Invasion* are hidden behind the entry door in the first level.

> *All of the software that IntraCorp was publishing was total crap*
> **Rick Leinecker**

» [PC] In *Home Alone 2: Lost In New York* Kevin just runs away from the Wet Bandits over and over until the end of the level.

the newly available graphical technology, like the *Wolfenstein 3D* engine directly from id Software. "Luckily for us when we installed it on a PC we found out we were able to make a build with almost no effort," remembers Rafael. "Once we figured out how the tools worked, which consisted of a map editor for building the levels and a tool to add the sprites in the game, we embarked on sifting through many files of C code."

In 1994 Capstone released its first title, *Corridor 7: Alien Invasion*, one of the first commercially released FPS games to feature online multiplayer. "When Capstone started making *Corridor 7*, a small team was working on it. That changed pretty soon with the arrival of lead programmer Les Bird, Jeff Schultz, Joe Abbati and myself," remembers Rafael. "We did some additions to the code of *Wolfenstein*: multiplayer network support, new sound system, tiled floors and ceilings, helper bots and a more robust AI system."

The same year, the company also released FPS *Operation Body Count*. Joe Abbati remembers, "There were about six of us at the start and we grew steadily – all of us wanting to do more exciting FPS or elaborate *Ultima Underworld* stuff. Getting the *Wolfenstein* engine to build a few titles was super cool. We were all learning new things and enjoying working together." One member of the art team was Scott Nixon, who joined just out of high school and confirms, "Yes, I was the one who drew over the *Doom* sprites to use in *Operation Body Count*! Frankly I didn't think much about it at the

» [PC] Poor Homey can't catch a break, as soon as he steps foot outside his office, he'll be assaulted by all kinds of thieves.

TIMELINE

1987

■ **SPACE MATH – ATARI ST**
A small educational title that was part of the low-budget line of software IntraCorp was releasing in the mid-Eighties.

1988

■ **MURDER ON THE ATLANTIC – MS-DOS**
Published by IntraCorp, the game, with a story written by Rick, was among the first commercial games published by the company on the US market.

1989

■ **MIAMI VICE – ATARI ST/MS-DOS**
Inspired by the classic TV series, the game featured a series of levels based on some of the episodes with a mix of racing, both cars and a speedboat, as well as action platforming sequences.

1990

■ **TOM CLANCY'S THE CARDINAL OF THE KREMLIN – AMIGA / MS-DOS**
IntraCorp got the licence from Tom Clancy to develop this managerial title where the player is tasked with building a network of laser defences for the US before the Russians complete a similar project. By all accounts, the writer was not involved at all in the game's development.

1991

■ **TRUMP CASTLE II – MS-DOS**
IntraCorp published an entire series of casino games licensed with the Donald Trump brand, which the programmers remember as quick and cheap work.

1991

■ **BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE – AMIGA / COMMODORE 64 / MS-DOS**
Many of the games released in the early Nineties by IntraCorp were cheap licensed products developed by external teams. This version features Bill and Ted visiting different times to recover information to deliver a historical school paper in time.

1992

■ **HOME ALONE 2: LOST IN NEW YORK – PC**
Developed by Manley & Associates, which would later become Electronic Arts Seattle, this was different from the console versions of the game featuring movie stills and different levels but keeping the side-scrolling platformer gameplay.

1992

■ **LA LAW: THE COMPUTER GAME – MS-DOS**
Based on the NBC law drama that ran for eight seasons, this was developed by Synergistic Software (*Thexder*, *Spectre*) and published by Capstone. It is a point-and-click adventure using, for the most part, digitised stills taken from the TV series for the actors and characters.

stone

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

AMY BOYLAN-SMITH

■ Amy joined Capstone in 1992 as a director, overseeing production of most of the titles released by the company from 1993. Over the course of four years, she would work her way to the position of vice president of Capstone. She left the company in 1996 to work for Acclaim, working as executive producers for titles such as *Turok* and *Alien Trilogy*.

LEIGH ROTHSCHILD

■ Leigh Rothschild was the original founder of IntraCorp, along with its subsidiary Capstone. He acted as president of both companies, along with being the executive producers of all games released under the IntraCorp moniker until 1996. He still currently works in IT, in 2018 he founded tech company Qmage.

SCOTT NIXON

■ Scott joined the company while still in high school, working at Electronics Boutique where Leigh Rothschild often came to shop. He worked on the sprites for *Corridor 7: Alien Invasion*, along with level design on *Operation Body Count* and *Witchaven*. Since then, he has continued working in the industry, being project director on several adventure games with the Agatha Christie licence and working on design for *The Elder Scrolls Online*.

RAFAEL PAIZ

■ Rafael joined Capstone as a programmer, working on *Operation Body Count* as his first title, then developing all of its subsequent first-person shooters until *Witchaven II*. Since then he has also worked on the *Redneck Rampage* FPS series and *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, along with being a senior programmer on *The Matrix: Path Of Neo*.

JOE ABBATI

■ Joe Abbati was hired fresh out of college, right after graduating from the music engineering technology program at The University Of Miami. He was hired to handle everything audio, from programming to sound design and music creation. Along with the first-person shooter titles by Capstone, he has also worked as QA for various IntraCorp titles like *Homey D Clown*. After 1996 he worked on the sound design for several PlayStation titles, including *Duke Nukem: Time to Kill*.

RICK LEINECKER

■ Rick Leinecker's first videogame credit was working on the Atari and Apple versions of *Murder On The Atlantic*, for which he also acted as a writer. Initially hired as a senior programmer in 1987, he would then remain in IntraCorp/Capstone acting as a director of technology until 1993 where, after discussions with Leigh Rothschild, he would leave the company. He worked on a couple of minor games then, but mostly remained in the IT business.

time, it was just a way for me to save some time and, well, I thought I differentiated them enough to not be a legal problem at all."

After releasing its first few shooters, Capstone got its hands on the BUILD engine which, back then, wasn't even finished. Rafael remembers, "Ken Silverman was about 16 when he wrote the core code for the engine, while working on *Duke Nukem 3D*. The editor was so much fun to use, many of the limitations inherent to *Wolfenstein* were no longer there." But, while the programming was solid, he mentions problems with the art team, "I was a bit discouraged that the art team was unable to make a better selection of creatures and monsters. Their morale was pretty low, there were many problems mostly due to time limitations and a very short dev cycle."

7:05
Tell me again what happened.
We were racing. He banged his car into mine, then went off the cliff. No way did I force his car off. The guy was a lousy driver. He couldn't handle the speed and lost control.
CONTINUE

» [PC] In *LA Law* there are several possible characters to play as, even though that makes little difference to how the game actually plays.

Asked about her fondest memories at Capstone, producer Amy Boylan-Smith mentions *TekWar* and how she managed to get a hold of the licence for William Shatner's TV series in order to produce an FPS. "Despite most titles having a small budget, there were a few exceptions. We managed to get William Shatner on the set to do the cutscenes for the game. It was quite an exciting time, I was a big fan!" *TekWar* was indeed Capstone trying its hands at a very ambitious title, it is remembered today as one of the first commercial games to use the BUILD engine. "Shatner was really nice and genuinely interested in the work, he came down a few times and hung out at the studio with his wife," Scott mentions. "I recall going with him and a few other people to Joe's Stone Crabs in South Beach. It was a hotspot at the time, but of course they sat us immediately! We had a Silicon Graphics Indigo setup in one large studio where me and another artist, Ernie Roque, shot all the Shatner footage and people doing walk cycles as characters in the game. In retrospect, I honestly wish I had taken it more seriously, the game had potential, but I think it's quite clear that potential went unrealised."

Rafael Paiz comments, "Our work, production of assets and integration into the game, was fairly similar to any other development studio, but with one big difference. Capstone never had a single design document, a storyboard or even an engineering document. This was probably due to time constraints as we were typically just given around six months from start to finish. What we managed to accomplish in that short amount of time was nothing short of a miracle."

From 1993 to 1996, Capstone released – among other titles – five different first-person shooters: a feat that would be impossible today. *Witchaven*, released in 1995, was a FPS with a fantasy vibe, inspired by Raven Software's *Heretic*. Rafael remembers that, while the team somehow managed to ship the game on time, there was a

> *"We managed to get William Shatner on the set to do cutscenes for the game. It was exciting, I was a big fan"*
> **Amy Boylan-Smith**

ESSENTIAL GAMES

OPERATION BODY COUNT

MS-DOS – 1994

■ This military-themed FPS was developed by Capstone using an improved *Wolfenstein 3D* engine, featuring fully texture mapped floors and ceilings. It was nominated by magazine *Power Play*, in its February 1995 issue, as the worst *Doom* clone to come out in 1994.

CORRIDOR 7: ALIEN INVASION

MS-DOS – 1994

■ Set in the 'distant' future of 2012, *Corridor 7* was Capstone's sci-fi take on the FPS genre, again using the *Wolfenstein 3D* engine. It was a superior effort and was overall better received than its predecessor, but got partially obscured by the release of *Doom* and its sequel.

problem, "The game had not been fully tested, it had several design issues. Only by the grace of God some levels were even possible to complete without having to load a saved game or start from the beginning."

Rafael also worked on *Witchaven*'s sequel. "I remember going to Germany with Amy to interview a young Russian protégé living in Norway. It was amazing to see a game store in Germany with shelves filled with *Witchaven* boxes! The sequel was being developed really more as a sort of expansion pack to the original, rather than a fully fledged title, in the end, since we barely had time to complete it." *Witchaven II* ended up being the very last title released by Capstone, as Scott Nixon recalls, "The company was really trying to go public around that time. Leigh would show up with investors every week, show them around, and we'd do the dog and pony show. *Witchaven II* wasn't very ambitious, it really did feel more like DLC than a sequel. After that Capstone shut down, but a few of us stayed working there as they tried to go into VR for real estate. It didn't pan out, and I left for n-Space shortly thereafter."

> *Capstone never had a single design or engineering document, not even a storyboard. We were typically just given around 6 months for each project, from start to finish*
> **Rafael Paiz**

We asked executive producer Amy Boylan-Smith about Capstone's reputation as one of the worst software houses of the Nineties, to which she replied that, while true that its titles were mostly small budgeted affairs, to her they felt like decent games. "They didn't seem to be as bad to me, back in the day, as people seem to be saying today…" Rafael, instead, also comments about the lack of adequate QA, "Testing was very rushed, a major flaw that probably caused the games to feel unpolished. We lacked any bug-tracking or bug-reporting software and it was very difficult to keep track of the bugs that were found."

Also, the atmosphere in the office by the end had deteriorated, as Rafael also recalls, "Morning roll call, surveillance cameras, the forced dilution of our company stock and the failure to go public all contributed to a pretty low morale for the staff, by 1995. There was always a certain level of animosity between the dev team and marketing. I thought this was nuts, but the marketing team seemed to only praise our external developers, which would then ship unfinished or broken games." Considering the pressure and the budget Capstone was working for, its reputation as a bad software house, can definitely be interpreted in a different light. Most of the former Capstone developers do still have fond memories of the time and they all agree that the company allowed them to get a foot in the gaming industry. Scott Nixon also mentions how Amy helped fund his subsequent gaming studio, and Rafael also has fond memories of working with her.

By setting its ambitions too high and its overheads too low, Capstone never managed to become "the pinnacle of online entertainment". Still, for many young talented developers it was a way to start working in the industry, before going on to bigger and better things. Most of the IntraCorp software releases are barely worth rediscovering today, but still stand as fascinating time capsules, wondering what could have the team delivered, being given the appropriate time and resources. *

» [PC] Unfortunately, we do not have a dollar to buy a chilli dog, as much as we'd like to.

TIMELINE

1993
■ **HOMEY D CLOWN – MS-DOS**
Among the weirdest licensed titles released by the company, the point-and-click adventure with action sequences was again developed by Synergistic Software and produced by Capstone. Joe Abbati, working on the QA, remembers that by 1993 the licence had mostly run out of value.

1993
■ **THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES – MS-DOS**
Mentioned by many former programmers as one of the worst examples of the quality of titles that Capstone was releasing, it was another licensed title developed by Synergistic Software. It featured a similar style of gameplay to the other point-and-click adventures it had been releasing with the publisher.

1993
■ **GRANDMASTER CHESS (CD-ROM EDITION) – MS-DOS**
A graphically advanced, for the time, version of chess which also included a bonus CD-ROM with a *Terminator 2* chess set. Artist Scott Nixon remembers there was a cheat code for the fantasy set pieces that removed all the pieces' clothing, but can't remember what the code was.

1993
■ **TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY – CHESS WARS – MS-DOS**
Using the same engine and interface of *Grandmaster Chess*, this was a licensed *Terminator 2* version using characters from the movie series and with added gory cutscenes when the pieces were eliminated from the board.

1993
■ **DISCOVERIES OF THE DEEP – MS-DOS**
An educational simulation game which allows the player to search for sunken treasure (and ships, including the Titanic) using both a submarine and a ship.

1995
■ **ZORRO – MS-DOS**
Zorro was the odd one out of the Capstone Nineties games: a platformer developed by a different team than the one who had been working on the FPS. It was strongly influenced by the *Prince Of Persia* series. The interesting link between *Zorro* and the FPS genre was that the soundtrack was composed by Bobby Prince, the main composer of *Doom* and its sequel.

WITCHAVEN
MS-DOS/WINDOWS – 1995
■ As the knight Grondoval, you have been chosen to stop the evil plans of the witch Illwhyrin, who cast a curse of darkness on the land of Stazhia. This BUILD engine FPS in the vein of Raven Software's *Heretic* is recognised as one of the best titles developed by Capstone.

WILLIAM SHATNER'S TEKWAR
MS-DOS – 1995
■ Developed with the BUILD engine, it lets the player roam a sort of open world and visit various levels while obeying Shatner's mission briefings. The game also features cutscenes between levels with the actor, usually scolding the player for killing too many innocents.

WITCHAVEN II: BLOOD VENGEANCE
MS-DOS/WINDOWS – 1996
■ The very last title released by Capstone was designed to be a fully-fledged sequel, but instead ended up as being little more than an expansion pack. Grondoval is on the hunt again, trying to stop the evil sister of Illwhyrin, Cirae-Argoth, as she comes to avenge her death.

ESSENTIAL GAME
STREET FIGHTER II: SPECIAL CHAMPION EDITION

If you're playing Capcom's classic fighter with a three-button controller, you're barely playing it at all. This unfortunate situation lumps you with access to punches or kicks only, with the Start button used to swap between them. This is massively awkward, to say the least. Having a six-button control pad allows you access to all moves at all times, and you can even pause the game. What a luxury! With all of this in mind, it really is very silly that Sega included this game on the Mega Drive Mini and then bundled it with three-button control pads.

Six-Button Control Pad

» **PLATFORM:** Mega Drive » **RELEASED:** 1993
» **COST:** £14.99 (launch), £15+ (today, boxed), £7+ (today, unboxed)

When the JAMMA arcade standard was introduced in Japan, it specified support for up to three action buttons. However, the number of buttons on cabinets increased considerably when the fighting game boom of the Nineties took hold. *Street Fighter II* used six buttons, *Mortal Kombat* used five and even the Neo Geo fighters used four. This wasn't a problem for the SNES, as its controller had four face buttons and two shoulder buttons, allowing it to host *Street Fighter II* without issue. With that arcade hit coming to the Mega Drive in 1993, its old three-button controller was no longer adequate, leading Sega to replace it.

Rather than imitating Nintendo's controller, Sega's new six-button control pad simply added a second row of three buttons above the existing ones. These new buttons were slightly smaller and convex rather than concave, to help differentiate them under the thumb. A new Mode button was added on the shoulder of the controller, in order to switch to three-button operation for games with compatibility issues. The body of the controller was also revised. The pad was widely supported, with about 60 Mega Drive games and more Mega-CD and 32X games utilising the extra buttons.

Six-Button Control Pad fact

■ Though the Mode button was not intended to be used during gameplay, plenty of developers used it – it works in games such as *Fatal Fury 2* and *The Story Of Thor*, for example.

SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

» *Ecco* creator Ed Annunziata is working on a new dolphin game – follow him at twitter.com/edannunziata

» *Ecco Jr And The Great Ocean Treasure Hunt!* designer Shannon Donnelly is now a writer, see shannondonnelly.com for details.

» Although *Ecco: Sentinels Of The Universe* was cancelled, its level builder Mihály Sáránszki still makes homebrew games today.

» Games industry veteran Maurice Molyneaux, who worked on *Ecco: Defender Of The Future*, is also a screenwriter, writer and filmmaker.

BORIS ©92

THE EVOLUTION OF ECCO THE DOLPHIN

» [Mega Drive] A key element of *Ecco The Dolphin* is using sonar to get clues from other sea creatures.

» [Apple II] A project called *Voyage Of The Mimi* got *Ecco* creator Ed Annunziata interested in sea mammals.

» [Mega Drive] Most of the obstacles in *Ecco The Dolphin* are beneath the waves, but a few are above water.

After years of trying to get his dolphin game made, Ed Annunziata realised his dream with Ecco The Dolphin in 1992. Ed and designers of the later Ecco games explain how the series evolved, and Ed discusses Ecco's spiritual successor

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

It would be fair to say that *Ecco The Dolphin* was a long time in the making. Its designer Ed Annunziata had done research on whales while coding educational games for Sunburst Communications in the mid-Eighties, and then in his own time he created a prototype called *Dolphin*. *Dolphin* was in no way educational, however, and Ed needed a team to develop it, so he left Sunburst in the late-Eighties to work for Sega as a producer. To his disappointment, his new employer wasn't looking for new ideas, but Ed kept pitching his project while managing others, until Sega's CEO Tom Kalinske announced a fortuitous change of direction. "There was a meeting at CES in Las Vegas with the whole company," Ed enthuses. "We met with Tom Kalinske, and he gave us an inspirational speech. He said, 'Look. The games we make have got to be *different*.' I was sitting next to Al Nielsen, who was in charge of marketing, and a bunch of other marketing people, and I just pointed down to a piece of paper with dolphins I'd drawn on it, and said, 'Different!' Right then, *Dolphin* got on to the road map of games that needed to be made."

To begin with, Ed was given a small budget to prove his concept, and although he had a definite vision for *Dolphin* there was no shortage of advice on how to proceed. "I just got a couple of pennies to make a prototype," Ed notes, "and then Sega would decide whether to allow me to build the rest of the game. At that time it wasn't called *Ecco*, because I hated the idea that he had a name. I didn't want to map human culture onto the game. Everybody was like, 'You've got to put in scuba divers with harpoons, and whalers.' I was like, 'No humans!' I wanted it to be about dolphins, not humans."

After Ed's prototype secured him approval to make his dolphin game, he designed subsea caves for his hero to dart around, although this combination wasn't ideal. "Allowing the dolphin to go fast was a problem," Ed concedes. "It was a punch in the face to gameplay, because you couldn't predict what you were going to run into. Of course, in our game-design brilliance what we did was put in a bunch of shit that hurt you if you run into it too fast. So that wasn't a good idea, but it was the way we did it, and we were obligated to do it that way, because all we had were scrolling playfields and a bunch of sprites, so how many permutations could there be?"

> "I WANTED TO SCIENCE THE F OUT OF THAT GAME! SO WE HAD TO HAVE ECHOLOCATION, AND IT HAD TO GIVE YOU A MAP"
> **ED ANNUNZIATA**

As well as swimming fast, Ed also wanted his hero to map his surroundings with sonar, but he kept things scientifically plausible in order to encourage exploration. "I wanted to science the *f* out of that game!" Ed exclaims. "So we *had* to have echolocation, and it *had* to give you a map. But how did we still keep the exploration? The simple solution was that we only showed a few nearby things. But I'm not sure a whole bunch of people used it. You had to hold a button while you waited for the reflection of the sonar to come back, and then you'd touch it to make a map. So it wasn't easy to stumble upon."

A more essential use of the dolphin's sonar was talking with whales, orcas and ▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: WATERY ABILITIES

THE SPECIAL MOVES OF THE ECCO THE DOLPHIN SERIES

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

Ecco can swim pretty fast in his debut, although given the game's hazards it's rarely advisable. He can also jump out of the water and over obstacles, and kill foes with a 'charge' move. His sonar lets him talk to other sea mammals, map his surroundings and move obstructive crystals.

ECCO: THE TIDES OF TIME

The basic sonar and charge of *The Tides Of Time* work much the same as they do in the original. The two new native abilities Ecco has in the sequel are a double-charge, which takes out foes with one charge instead of two, and a sonar-charge, where you fire sonar at enemies while charging them.

ECCO: DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE

As well as variants of the original game's moves adapted for 3D space, Ecco has a raft of new manoeuvres in *Defender Of The Future*. Swimming backwards is useful for monitoring opponents, and there are two sideways moves – a 180-degree turn and a corkscrew roll – that help you avoid sharks.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

UNDERWATER UPGRADES

FROM SHARK STUNNING AND MORPHING TO POWER BALLADS

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

The original game's power-ups are gained by finding 'glyphs' – magic crystals – and completing challenges. Some glyphs restore health, while others temporarily make you invulnerable. The best challenge-based upgrades let you stun sharks with your sonar and turn it into a ranged-weapon.

ECCO: THE TIDES OF TIME

There's a very handy sonar upgrade in *The Tides Of Time*, which essentially gives Ecco a multidirectional death-ray! The sequel's other top power-ups allow him to morph into other creatures – including a gull, a jellyfish and a shark, although these transformations are level-specific.

ECCO: DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE

Defender's power-ups are split into Songs, Gifts and Collectibles. The gifts include the Power Of Stealth, which turns Ecco invisible, and there are songs that let him control certain creatures. The coolest pick-up is a harness that allows the hero to use machines.

other dolphins, and it could also be used to interact with mysterious crystals. "So there was a rule: sea turtles don't talk, little fish don't talk and crabs don't talk with French accents!" Ed jokes. "But sea mammals could talk with each other using echolocation. The other thing we had was 'glyph' crystals; they were like the locks and keys of the game. They also contained messages and power-ups. The backstory was that they had been planted in the sea by the Atlanteans, knowing that in thousands of years a dolphin was going to follow their breadcrumbs and help them."

One final, if violent, use of sonar had sold Sega on Ed's project – now called *Ecco The Dolphin*, and by the end of its development its protagonist had a second attack. "The reason I'd had a hard time convincing Sega about the game was because really there were no guns," Ed points out. "But it was kind of plausible that sonar could be manipulated into a range weapon. So I started with sonar, and I built on it. I wanted Ecco's charge to be an action, not the result of just swimming fast by tapping the button to swim fast. So I put the charge in to give you a 'punch' action, where Ecco would reel back and then shoot forward."

Praised for its cerebral challenges rather than its hero's brutality, *Ecco The Dolphin* topped several charts, which led to a sequel that took inspiration from a coin-op. "Sega very generously gave me an *entire* megabyte for *ides Of Time*," Ed says wryly, "so I had a little wiggle room to do some stuff, and we all wanted that *Space Harrier* thing were you went into the screen. The animation was just a flipbook of fixed images. So the same rocks and waves went by, but you still felt like you're going into the screen. Then the teleportation rings were perfectly scalable objects that Ecco could jump through to accelerate."

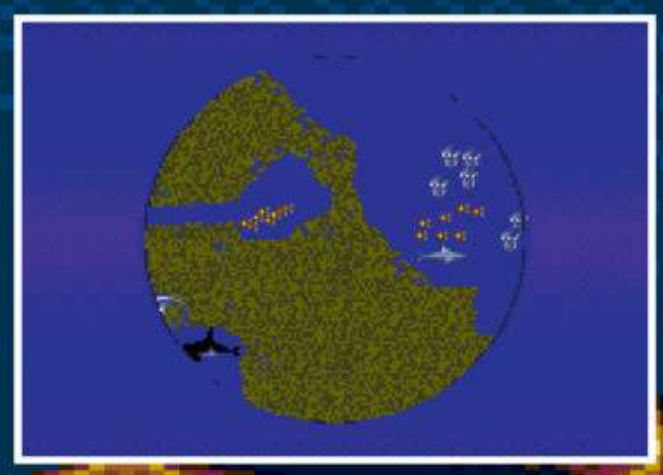
As well as teleporting Ecco through time, the follow-up further bolstered its sci-fi credentials by allowing him to morph into other animals – although Ed set strict limits on this. "If I had allowed *any* transformation on *any* level we would have had to have had at least double the test-time!" Ed laughs. "*Every* permutation of Ecco's morph abilities would have had to have been tested on *every* level to find out where all of the fuck-ups were. So it was more like, 'Let's tie a level around Ecco turning into a bird.' So you still got to turn into a bird, but we didn't kill 40 testers!"

Other evolutions from its predecessor included more powerful weapons such as a 360-degree sonar blast, which was devastating to Ecco's foes for the short spells that he had it. "The game was so unforgiving to begin with that it was easy not to make Ecco's abilities too powerful," Ed reckons, "and if they *were* powerful then you only got them for a temporary amount of time. I certainly never heard that it was too

> "WE ALL WANTED THAT SPACE HARRIER THING WERE YOU WENT INTO THE SCREEN. THE ANIMATION WAS JUST A FLIPBOOK OF FIXED IMAGES"
> **ED ANNUNZIATA**

» [Mega-CD] Like its sequel, the first *Ecco The Dolphin* game was enhanced on Mega-CD with extra levels and a new red book audio soundtrack by Spencer Nilson.

› [Mega Drive] Some of the crystal-like glyphs in *Ecco The Dolphin* act as barriers that you use sonar to dislodge.



easy. The testers were like, 'If I hear Ecco cry one more time I'm going to throw the Genesis out of the window!' So we just kept trying to make it easier as we got more and more feedback."

The types of challenges in the follow-up also differentiated it from Ed's original *Ecco* title, in so much as they were logistic in nature and fed into the game's narrative. "We had a few quests that were simply: go to X, Y coordinates," Ed says on reflection, "and if you got there then you had solved the quest. But then what? Alright, so you found this, changed that and were given a narrative, like an orca mother had lost its baby and you had to find it. I just wanted more and more of that, because it was an opportunity to tell more story. Not just a quest from point 'a' to point 'b,' but one where shit happened!"

The deeper gameplay in *The Tides Of Time* was noted on its release, but Ed's next *Ecco* game had far less sophisticated mechanics and more emphasis on having fun. "I did *Ecco Jr* for my daughter," Ed smiles. "But also, anyone who hadn't played the *Ecco* games viewed them as peaceful games, even though they were filled with violence. But there was this feeling that you just wanted to play them to have a fun time being a dolphin. I hadn't delivered on that, so I needed to make a peaceful game that hopefully my daughter would be into. That was my thinking."

In order to make *Ecco Jr* accessible to a younger audience, Ed devised risk-free objectives for his game and made its predators pacifists instead of deadly foes. "There were challenges that you could overcome, but nothing wanted to hurt you," Ed remembers. "I didn't want the world to have enemies. That was the kind of thing where you come up with an idea in the beginning and you stick to it, and then it's like religion and you're really defending the principle. That's actually a mistake when you come up with a notion like that and then just mindlessly follow it, but that's what I did."

Other aspects of *Ecco Jr* underwent radical changes, however, such as its shift from an absorbing learning experience based on experimentation to something less ambitious. "Rather than the player entering a situation that had to be solved, I wanted curiosity to drive them," Ed ponders. "So challenges that were not figuring out the idea behind something, but just the behaviours of things and how to interact with them. That was where it was in my mind, but then as it came together I had to simplify it. We were running out of time and money, you know, all that stuff, so that's where it was."

This simplified approach to *Ecco Jr* saw Ed devise a series of self-contained levels, based on traditional children's games, rescue missions and entertaining tests of skill. "You had to swim through five musical rings, and so on. That was a cool mechanism, and if I'd had more time I would have composed many songs," Ed reflects. "With hide-and-seek, and tag, I wanted to say, 'Hey kids! Do you see these little dolphins? They're kids too. These are kids that you're playing with, and they play games. What kind of games? The kinds of games *you* play!'"

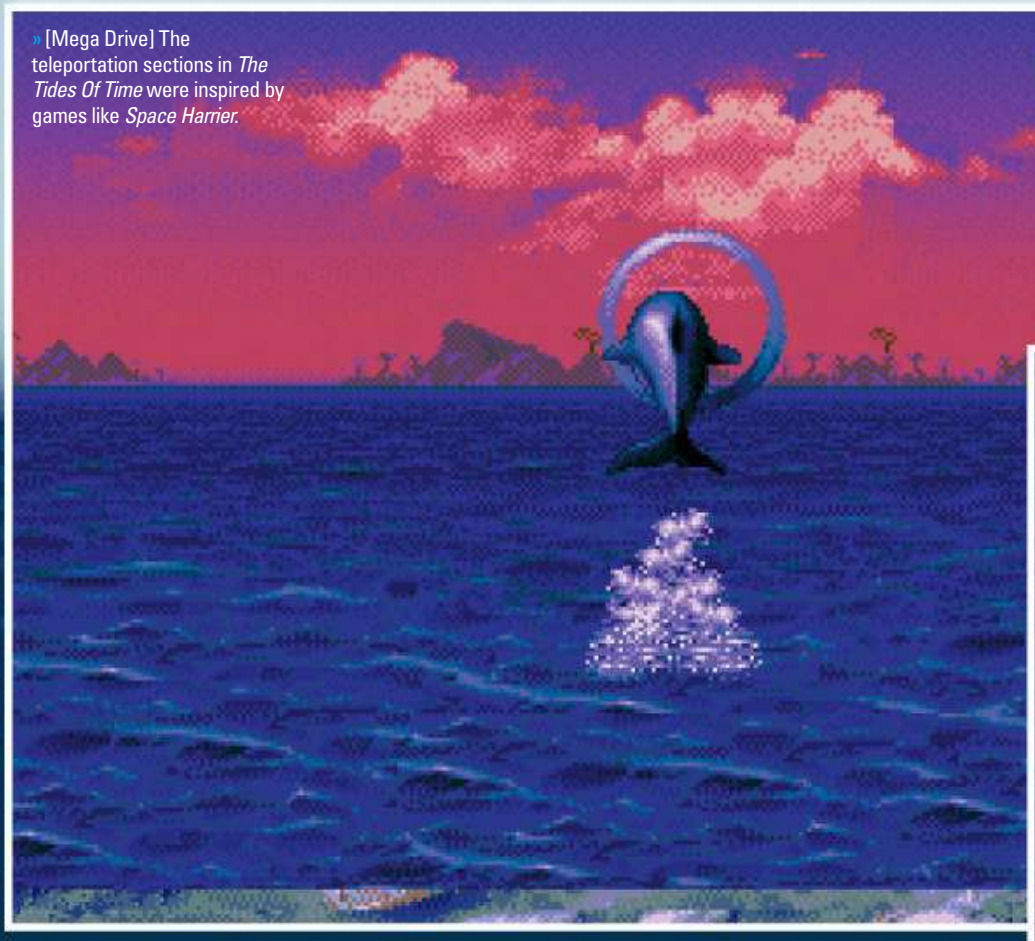
While Ed finished his Mega Drive *Ecco Jr*, a second *Ecco Jr* title was being made for Sega's educational console the Pico, although the two games were entirely different. "The Pico had a stylus to move things around the screen," Ed reviews. "The way it worked was that there was a little book that had like ten pages, and the game

» [Mega Drive] Unlike the original game, *The Tides Of Time* has logistical puzzles, such as assembling groups of glyphs.

» [Mega Drive] *The Tides Of Time*'s 360-degree sonar blast is far more powerful than any of the original game's power-ups.

» [Mega Drive] As with the previous games you use sonar in *Ecco Jr*, like when you play hide-and-seek.

» [Mega Drive] There's a focus on logistical challenges in *Ecco Jr*, much like those in *The Tides Of Time*.

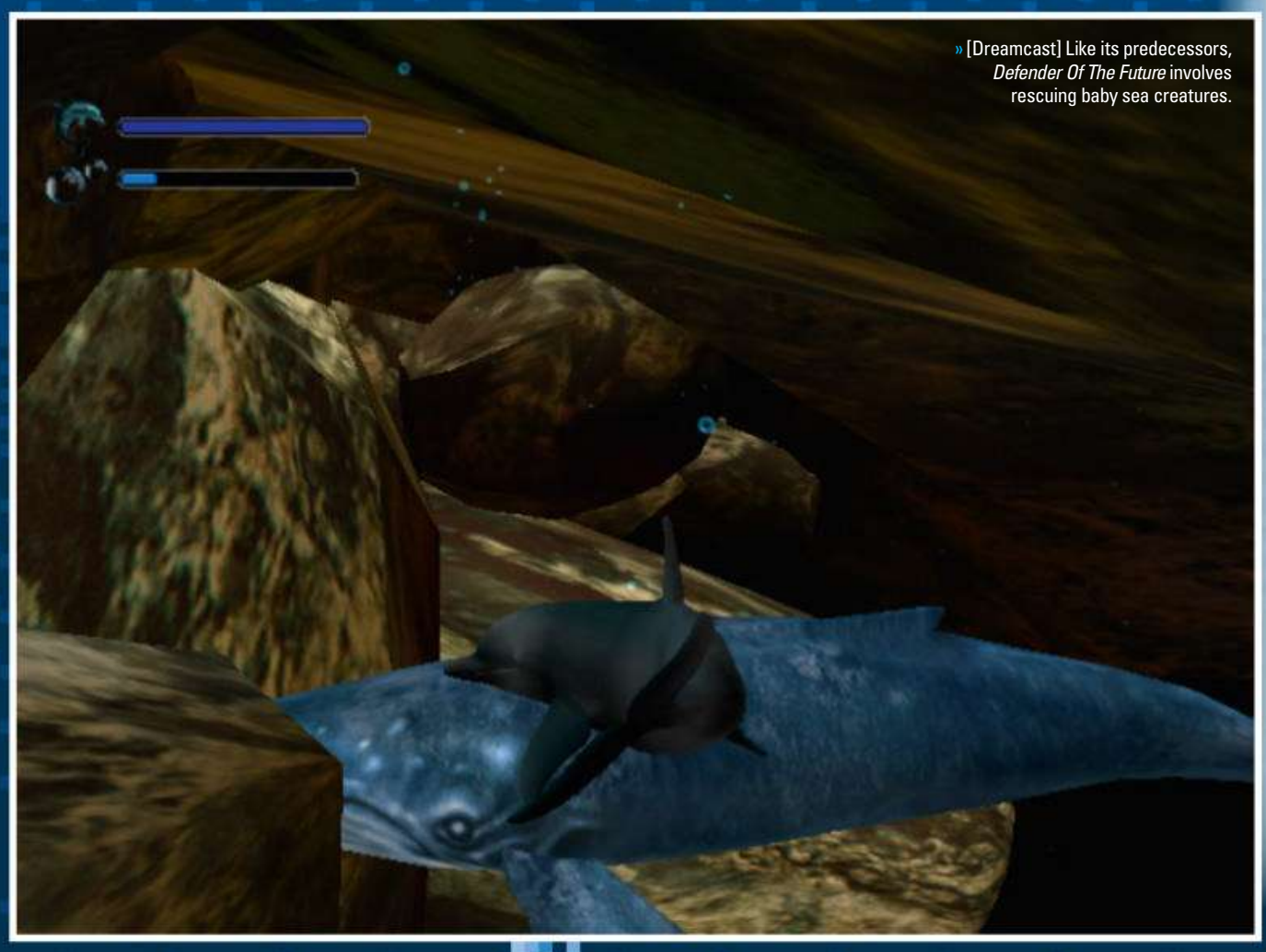


» [Mega Drive] The teleportation sections in *The Tides Of Time* were inspired by games like *Space Harrier*.

» [Mega Drive] Although it's aimed at kids, the likes of the treasure hunt in *Ecco Jr* are fun for all ages.

» [Pico] Some of *The Great Ocean Treasure Hunt!*'s levels are less educational than others, but they're a lot of fun.

» [Pico] *The Great Ocean Treasure Hunt!* is unarguably educational, but it's also very much a videogame.



» [Dreamcast] Like its predecessors, *Defender Of The Future* involves rescuing baby sea creatures.

▶ would know about every picture in the book that you touched with the stylus. You had to decide what Ecco should use by touching it on the page, and then it would appear in the game, so it was a completely different user interface. I admit I'm totally biased, but in my opinion it was by far the best Pico game. A lot of love went into that."

You might imagine the Pico game's designer would feel pressure given the success of the series, but as it was an educational title Shannon Donnelly only saw positives. "Ecco was just a fun character; there were no real pros or cons. A videogame was a different format, and so *The Great Ocean Treasure Hunt!* was viewed differently," Shannon reasons. "It was actually easier to market the game with a known character, as it took a lot to come up with a new character that could sell a game."

Of course, as well as being educational, *Ecco Jr And The Great Ocean Treasure Hunt!* had to play like a videogame, in fact that was Shannon's first and most important consideration. "The gameplay came first – if the game wasn't fun then nothing else worked," Shannon observes. "We then just weaved in the education. Sam Palahnuk worked on the game with me, and we had to do a lot to make sure that the interfaces worked. The hardest thing about the Pico was that kids really wanted to touch the stylus to the TV screen and not the book. It was almost too many options for them."

Five years later, Appaloosa Interactive was devising moves for a Dreamcast *Ecco* title, as designer Maurice Molyneaux found out when he belatedly joined the project. "Appaloosa had tried to recreate the mechanics of the 2D games – and it wasn't very much fun," Maurice sighs. "It was hard to hit things. You would try to charge, and you'd miss, so the 180-degree turn was simply just to help you. On the Genesis, if you wanted to flip around you just pushed Ecco in the other direction. Well that just didn't work in 3D, so there was a corkscrew move. I don't know where the tail-walking came from, but I felt it wasn't developed enough."

Ecco's Dreamcast outing – *Ecco: Defender Of The Future* – also had fresh power-ups that were

» [Dreamcast] There are power-ups called Gifts in *Defender Of The Future* that you activate with crystals.

split into Gifts, Songs and items, such as a harness that let him use machines. "The story was that this alien foe plunged back in history and took attributes away from the dolphins – those were their Gifts," Maurice recollects. "There was one per game world, and you had to bring them back to your time, but that part got cut out of the game. The Songs were named just because of whale songs, and the harness was specific to the Man's Nightmare level, where Ecco had to don this equipment that the dolphins of that civilisation had used."

One aspect of *Defender Of The Future* more closely reflected its 16-bit predecessors, more specifically, the Dreamcast game tied various mechanics to hidden crystals. "My guess is that the system for using the crystals was already in place, and that someone thought why not put some hints in there?" Maurice speculates. "I remember with the Gifts the idea was that you were supposed to take them back in time, but minus that feature I wonder if activating them with crystals was a patch to get around that whole cut mechanic of going back to the past."

The aspects of *Defender Of The Future* that it wasn't too late for Maurice to improve were its objectives and its interactivity, and so he focused his efforts on those areas. "Appaloosa needed me to actualise the game's story in a gameplay-related way. So I had a little influence on some of the levels, but a lot of that was just trying to design challenges. I also wrote most of the dialogue in the game. What I tried to do there was have you interacting with the dolphins, where they would tell you things and give you hints."

In no small part due to Maurice's course corrections, *Defender Of The Future* was praised

by reviewers, so a sequel was commissioned, as designer Mihály Sáránszki recalls. "Basically, it would have been a continuation of *Defender Of The Future*," Mihály says, "but with a more coherent storyline – because *Defender Of The Future*'s story was quite complicated and hard to follow. So *Ecco: Sentinels Of The Universe* would have been more linear and comprehensible, instead of all of that time-travel mess."

Quizzed on the new powers Ecco might have had if work on *Sentinels Of The Universe* had been completed, Mihály focuses on his own role rather than offering theories. "I built and managed the levels: the 3D objects, lights, rocks, plants, animals, cutscene animations, special effects and interactions," Mihály clarifies. "I didn't deal with correlations between the levels or Ecco's power-ups; instead I dealt with the in-level logic and mechanics – especially on the Volcano stage. Although none of *Sentinels Of The Universe*'s levels were completed."

The million dollar question, of course, is why Ecco's Dreamcast follow-up was cancelled, but on this point Mihály prefers to talk about the fallout of the decision. "There were corporate reasons for this – we also worked on other projects, and ▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

PERPLEXING PUZZLES

MARITIME MAZES, OCEANIC LOGISTICS AND SEA QUESTS

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

The puzzles in *Ecco The Dolphin* usually involve overcoming obstacles in underwater mazes. There are 'key' glyphs that let you pass 'lock' counterparts, and there's a giant octopus you have to slowly inch past. There are also stars and shells that you use to remove obstructive rocks.

ECCO JR

A major part of *Ecco Jr*'s challenge is solving logistics-based puzzles, where you have to find objects or creatures and take them to a specified location. Sometimes these have to be arranged and interacted with – like the game's musical hoops, but you're also sent on rescue missions.

ECCO: DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE

A number of missions in *Defender Of The Future* require problem solving. You have to work out how to free a baby whale that's trapped after a rock fall, for example, there's an exit guarded by a giant eel that you have to get past and you have to ask a turtle to scare off a manta ray.

> "APPALOOSA NEEDED ME TO ACTUALISE THE GAME'S STORY IN A GAMEPLAY-RELATED WAY, A LOT OF THAT WAS JUST TRYING TO DESIGN CHALLENGES"
>
> MAURICE MOLYNEAUX

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

DOLPHIN GAMES

HOW CASUAL CHALLENGES LED TO EDUTAINMENT AND MINIGAMES

ECCO JR

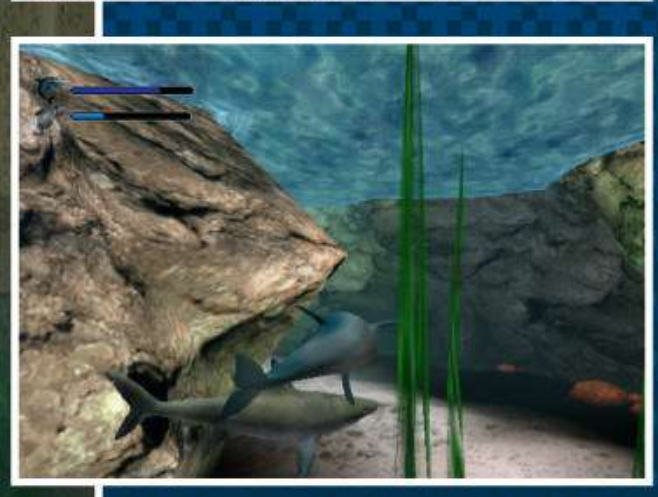
The levels in *Ecco Jr* often combine children's games with aspects from prior *Ecco* titles. So in hide-and-seek you find Ecco's friends using sonar, and in tag you pass shells or fish to friends to make them it. Its follow the leader is just that; but it's played in a maze-like ocean.

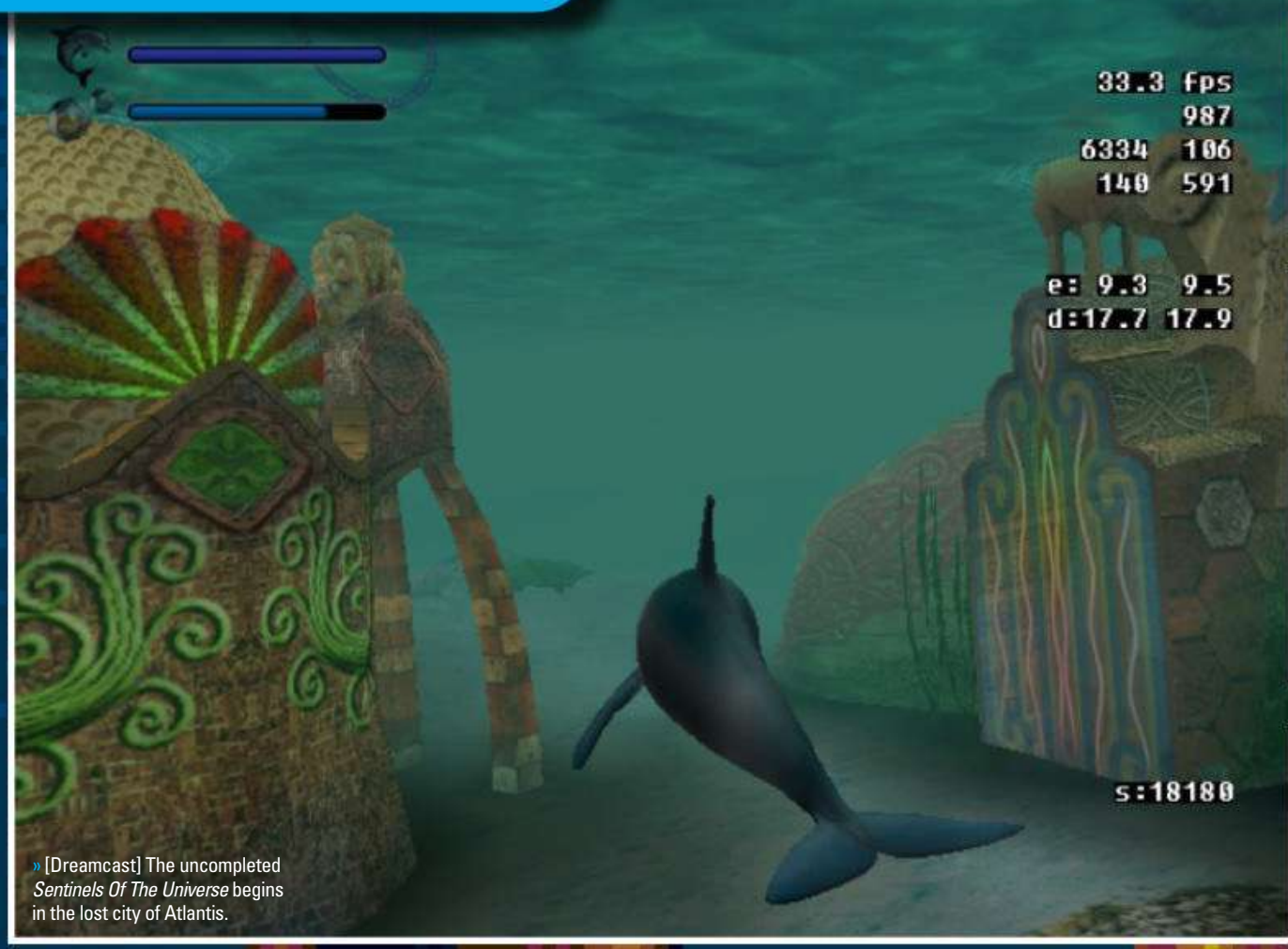
ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN TREASURE HUNT!

The educational stages of *Ecco Jr In The Great Ocean Treasure Hunt!* teach numbers, colours and musical notes, but the Pico title also has levels that are just for fun. Most noteworthy is its pufferfish challenge, where you blow up the fish and guide them to safety while fending off sharks and jellyfish.

ECCO: DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE

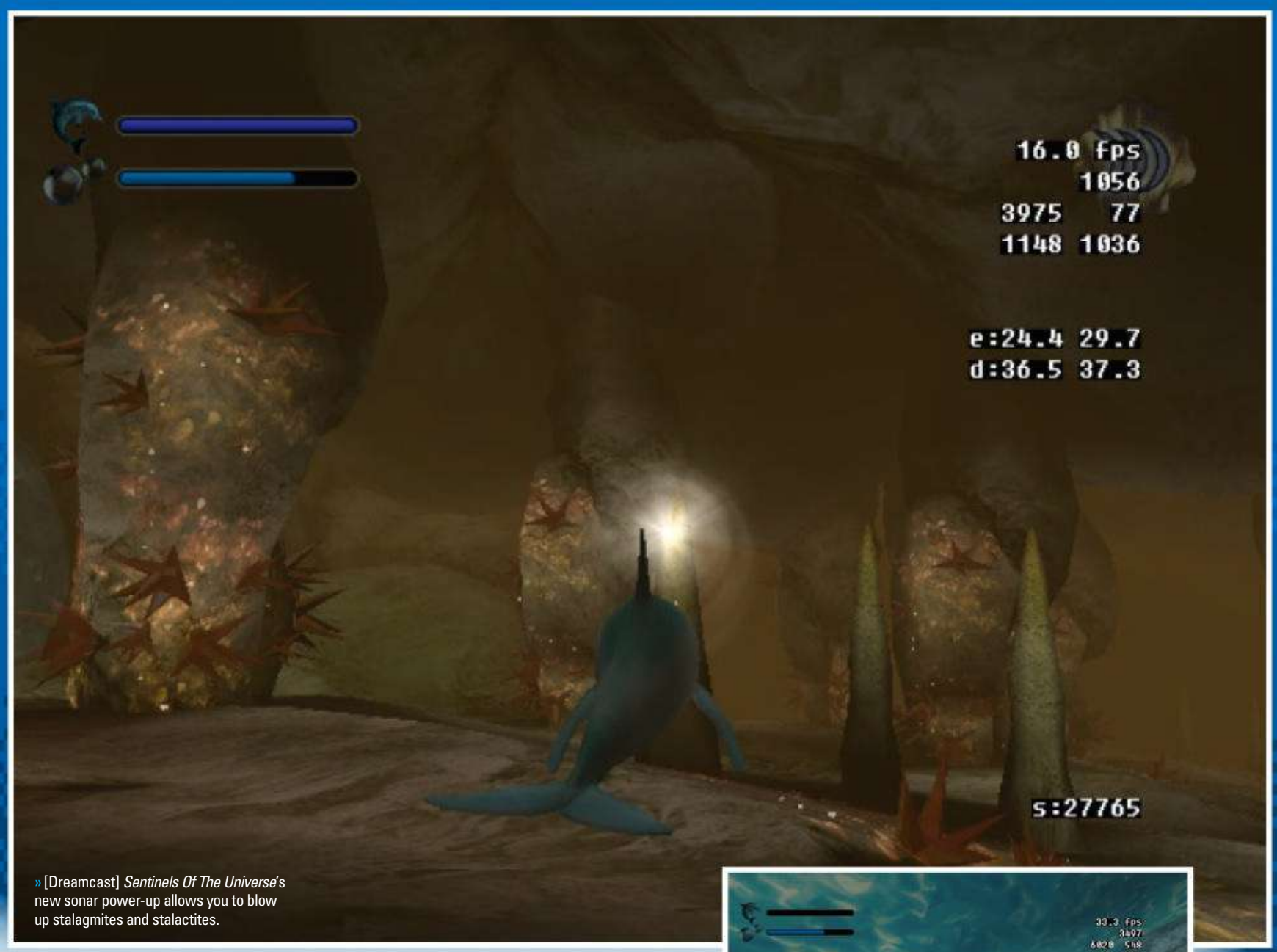
The minigames in this sequel are tests of navigation, speed and agility. These include a challenge to be the first to bring back a fish to a dolphin coach, a race against two dolphins around the seabed and a series of hoops that you jump through to unlock doors.





» [Dreamcast] The uncompleted *Sentinels Of The Universe* begins in the lost city of Atlantis.

» [Dreamcast] You get Songs by helping creatures in *Defender Of The Future*, including one that stuns sharks.



» [Dreamcast] *Sentinels Of The Universe*'s new sonar power-up allows you to blow up stalagmites and stalactites.

» [Dreamcast] In keeping with every other *Ecco* game there are plenty of sharks in *Sentinels Of The Universe*.

we continued to work on those," Mihály replies. "But it was bad for everyone, because we loved working on *Sentinels Of The Universe*. And players would have liked it better, because it had more varied and more natural locations, and it would have had more alien species."

> "THE TECH WE HAVE NOW IS BEAUTIFUL, SO I'M FINALLY PLAYING WHAT WAS IN MY MIND 30 YEARS AGO. I THINK IT'S GOING TO BE CALLED DOLPHIN QUEST"
> ED ANNUNZIATA

But while the *Ecco* series stalled with *Sentinels Of The Universe*, Ed Annunziata and his original Ecco team are making a spiritual successor that picks up from where they left off. "The tech we have now is beautiful," Ed beams, "so I'm finally playing what was in my mind 30 years ago. I think it's going to be called *Dolphin Quest*. There's a backstory about life on Earth and life in the universe, and it's a discovery about that, where we're going to take on the plastic in the ocean. So there's some hint of humanity, but not a good one."

Ed's plan is that *Dolphin Quest* will be a proof of concept for a bigger project, which he launched on Kickstarter as *The Big Blue* in 2013, before revising its scope and renaming it *The Little Blue*. "*The Big Blue*, *The Little Blue* and *Dolphin Quest* are all the same thing," Ed explains. "I pitched *The Big Blue*, and the money I calculated for the game I wanted to build was *large*. It didn't even come close to being funded, so I decided to make something smaller, because I knew if I could make something that everybody could try then I would get the backing to make a bigger game."

A complaint Ed often heard when he was making the original *Ecco* games was that you couldn't play as other marine animals, and so in *Dolphin Quest* you can. "All the sea mammals are available to control," Ed discloses, "and when you're an orca you've got more mass. So you don't jump as high but you can feel that inertia when you're going fast. It's multiplayer, so me and my three friends sitting on a sofa can all be in the same ocean. And we don't split the screen when all four swim away from each other, we just zoom-out to accommodate them all."

Partly because he's developing a modern-day dolphin game, and partly because of copyright issues, Ed reviews his *Ecco* games with some reservations, but those aside he's still very pleased to have created them. "It's a big mixed bag," Ed muses. "I'm so glad they exist. I mean, my house is the house that *Ecco* bought! But at the same time I facepalm when I see people saying how miserably hard they are. The other thing too is that I invented them and yet I can't just make *Ecco III* if I want to, so I don't like that part. The parts I love about them are that there are a few people out there still playing them, plus they help me a *lot* to make new games."

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Metal Slug

» **PLATFORM:** NEO GEO » **RELEASED:** 1996 » **DEVELOPER:** NAZCA CORPORATION

After conquering a couple of stages that put the emphasis firmly on the 'gun' part of run-and-gun, you've reached the third stage of *Metal Slug*, an icy ascent that challenges your platforming prowess as much as your trigger finger. Still, you've got the number of the enemy grunts by this point, even if they do now have massive snowballs.

When you reach the top, a shirtless, muscular man greets you, loudly laughing before shouting, "C'mon boy!" and engaging in battle. Rebel soldiers are normally easily scared and very sluggish, but this guy is an entirely different class of soldier – he's quick and fearless, with an M60 machine gun, grenades and a knife providing a variety of ways to kill you. What's more, he's tougher than a two-dollar steak. No matter how many times you hit him, it just seems to make him redder and angrier, until he finally collapses with a promise to, "See you in Hell!" You've just met the 'Immortal Devil Sergeant' Allen O'Neil, and somehow survived. Congratulations.

BIO

Created by a team of former Irem staff as a spiritual successor to *GunForce II*, *Metal Slug* enjoyed consistent popularity in Japanese arcades, spending five straight months in *Game Machine*'s top 25 chart. The Neo Geo home cartridge releases are now very expensive and even the CD version is pricey, but the game's popularity earned it ports to the Saturn and PlayStation too, and it has been regularly re-released since. With various sequels and spin-offs having been produced over the years, *Metal Slug* now stands as arguably the most recognisable of SNK's works outside of the fighting game genre.

MORE CLASSIC METAL SLUG MOMENTS

Enormous Enemy

Your initial encounter with a helicopter leaves you feeling vulnerable, but finding the titular Metal Slug tank gives you a real feeling of power – right up until you meet the first boss. This hulking contraption takes up most of the screen and bombards you with arcing shots, and can easily destroy your tiny tank if you're not careful.

Aerial Assault

During the second stage, you climb high over the city as the battle spreads to the rooftops. It's a magnificent view, but one that you don't get to enjoy for long. Soon enough, a squadron of planes flies into the scene, looping around and trying to take you out before you reach the boss scene that follows immediately afterwards.

Bring Down The House

A big red barrel marked 'Danger' – what could possibly happen here? This is a videogame, so it's obviously going to explode. And when it does, it does so in the most spectacular fashion. Not only does it take out all of the enemies on-screen, it brings down the entire building, eventually leaving nothing but heaps of rubble.

River Raid

As you get towards the end of the game, you need to make your way to the final confrontation with General Morden on a boat. Taking control of a mounted heavy machine gun, you've got to withstand a major assault from planes, paratroopers and even tanks on hastily constructed platforms, which dramatically collapse into the sea under fire.

THE MAKING OF THE TERMI

BEFORE GOING INDEPENDENT TO FORM SHINY ENTERTAINMENT AND ENJOY GREAT SUCCESS WITH EARTHWORM JIM, A SMALL TEAM OF CREATIVES BROUGHT JAMES CAMERON'S HUMAN-VS-MACHINE VISION TO LIFE IN ALL ITS 16-BIT GLORY. LEAD PROGRAMMER DAVID PERRY REVEALS HOW THE TERMINATOR ON THE MEGA DRIVE CAME TOGETHER...

WORD BY AARON POTTER

» [Mega Drive] The story begins with Kyle Reese taking on Terminators as part of the future war. You're stripped of a gun at first.

» [Mega Drive] Night-time in LA forms the game's second stage. Reese must fight through thugs and police to get to Tech Noir.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** PROBE SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

By 1992, *The Terminator* as a blockbuster movie franchise had well and truly taken off. The original film quickly became a financial success eight years prior (despite a mixed critical reaction), Arnold Schwarzenegger continued to cement himself as an impressive bodybuilder-turned-Hollywood action star, and already we were six months removed from *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*'s release – the most expensive movie ever produced at the time, and widely regarded by many as one of the best sci-fi sequels ever made. It might seem strange, then, for a publisher like Virgin Games – a relatively modest offshoot of Richard Branson's wider media empire – to want to capitalise on this ongoing success, not with a tie-in title based on director James Cameron's spectacular follow-up, but rather the unexpected breakthrough hit from 1984 that started it all.

Admittedly, since it first hit cinema screens on 26 October of that year, *The Terminator* had always seemed like a movie perfectly ripe for a videogame adaptation. Primarily centred on a future war in which a rogue AI intelligence has all but decimated the Earth using menacing metal endoskeletons, Cameron and producer Gale Anne Hurd's original script cleverly kept humanity's global effort to fight back against Skynet largely in the background of proceedings. Instead he chose to focus on a present-day time-travel story, in which one resistance warrior and cyborg would battle it out and determine the fate of these events in our time. Was this smoke-and-mirrors approach merely a way for James Cameron and distributor Orion Pictures to keep the budget low? Yes, but it still worked expertly to spark the imagination of cinema-going audiences everywhere. One such audience member was David Perry, a plucky, 17-year-old

NATOR

» David Perry served as the chief programmer on *The Terminator*'s Sega Mega Drive version.

» [Mega Drive] The movie's dramatic shoot-out in West Palm police station is faithfully recreated in-game, although shooting up stairs is tricky.

computer programmer from Northern Ireland who had recently moved to London with big aspirations to make games. "I was in a town called Kingston with a friend Chris Hinsley," says David, regarding his first interaction with Cameron's cult classic. "It was raining, and we decided to go into the movie theatre to get out of the rain; some movie was playing called *The Terminator*." Needless to say, it didn't take long for David to recognise that what he and his buddy were watching was something special. "I think we were in there alone, and James Cameron melted my brain," he enthuses. "I absolutely loved the movie."

It wouldn't be until just under a decade later, around the time of *Terminator 2*'s release in 1991, that David could even fathom the idea of working within such a rich sci-fi universe. By this point he had completed a stint at UK software company Mikro-Gen, and had moved on to a position making games at developer Probe Software. Founded by Fergus McGovern in 1984 – the same year the first *Terminator* movie released – it had built up a decent reputation developing titles for the Amstrad CPC, Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum in the late-Eighties, before setting its sights a lot higher with the arrival of a new decade. With this increased determination, the world of licensed videogames seemed like a natural next step.

"Fergus was a Jedi at getting licensing deals from the major publishers in the UK and USA," remembers David. "He also managed to get me a Sega Mega Drive/Genesis development kit." Via this business ingenuity and after securing Probe Software with the creative tools needed, Fergus brokered a deal with Orion Pictures to develop a game based on the 1984 film. As was effectively protocol for licensed games during the early 16-bit era, the title would mostly follow events depicted in its silver-screen counterpart, and would be published by Virgin Games. According to David, "We were really handed *The Terminator* on a plate."

The developers at Probe Software were initially excited at the prospect of working on *The Terminator* as its most ambitious tie-in project yet (it had worked on *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* for the NES only the year before). However, it quickly became clear that Orion Pictures had a very clear vision for the game in mind, one that would outright restrict

"THEY TOLD US THEY DIDN'T HAVE THE RIGHTS TO PUT ARNOLD IN THE GAME"
DAVID PERRY

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TRANTOR: THE LAST STORMTROOPER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

TEENAGE MUTANT HERO TURTLES
SYSTEM: NES, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1990

DISNEY'S ALADDIN
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1993

CONVERSION CAPERS HOW THE SEGA VERSIONS STACK UP

MEGA DRIVE

■ David Perry's version of *The Terminator*, as discussed in the bulk of this article, is a short but stylish run-and-gun shooter that stays extremely close to the movie's events. You attempt to defend Sarah Connor across four distinct stages. This framework was used as the basis for the later game *RoboCop Versus The Terminator*.

SEGA MEGA-CD

■ As you can imagine, the Mega-CD's extra horsepower sees Kyle's adventure through time run and play a lot smoother. The soundtrack is no longer chip-based, although you still play through the same four environments. It's arguably the most cinematic due to the addition of lifted movie clips. Unlike its peers, this Sega version was by Virgin Games, not Probe.

GAME GEAR

■ Events are framed a lot closer to the film in Sega's portable version of *The Terminator* on the Game Gear. Again, the same basic movie plot is followed, but the handheld's limited musical capabilities (and therefore lack of iconic theme) makes it feel just a touch less authentic. Dominic Wood served as programmer.

MASTER SYSTEM

■ Despite the onset of Mega Drive, Virgin Games and Probe Software were determined to support Sega's 8-bit Master System with a version of *The Terminator*. It's certainly a lot more low-fi, by comparison, but easily shares the most DNA from a pure aesthetic perspective. However, a lot more platforming is required from Reese here.

MACHINE VS MACHINE

SCI-FI ICONS COLLIDE IN THIS SUPERB FOLLOW-UP

The David Perry led, Mega Drive iteration of *The Terminator* might not have been all that well-received upon release, but publisher Virgin Games was impressed enough to greenlight a pseudo sequel two years later. *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* was developed by a new team, situated in-house at Virgin on the US side, pitting the two cybernetic sci-fi icons against one another for the first time ever in a game (read more in **RG** 205). Based on the four-issue comic book series of the same name by Frank Miller, players take on the role of police officer-turned-robot cop Alex Murphy as he tries to prevent Skynet from becoming self-aware.

Unfortunately for him, it's revealed early on that the existence of RoboCop is precisely what leads to Skynet's creation – causing the world to run rampant with Terminators. Your only hope to give humanity a fighting chance, therefore, is by gunning down waves and waves of knock-off Arnold Schwarzeneggers. It plays and looks extremely similar to its Mega Drive predecessor, but touts a greater amount of enemy variety that includes humans, T-800s and even RoboCop's classic ED-209 unit at one point, because of course!

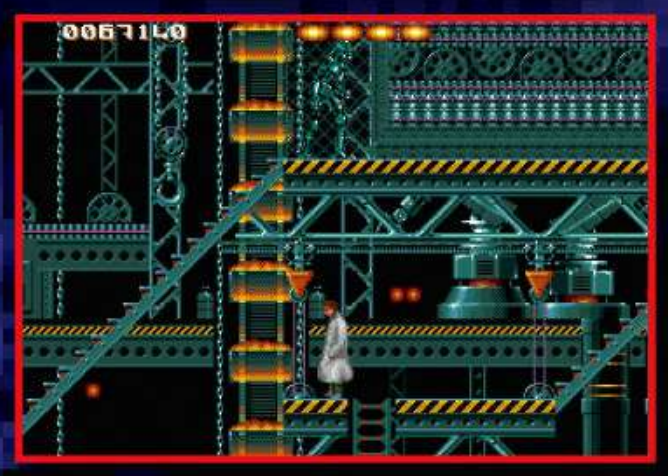
Similar to Virgin Games' handling of the licence in 1992, *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* released on multiple consoles including the Master System, Game Gear and even the Game Boy this time. A version was initially planned for the Mega-CD, too, until the market rapidly collapsed. Overall, though, watching these two universes collide in 16-bit didn't disappoint fans.

what David and his fellow developers would be able to achieve artistically. A lot of disagreement stemmed from either party's differing opinion on exactly which character from the movie people should play as: Michael Biehn's time-travelling soldier Kyle Reese, or Arnold Schwarzenegger's titular skin-coated battle tank?

"I think when you get a robot that's so powerful, it's like a mech but in human form... and I loved the idea of playing the game as the Terminator," reveals David, concerning which side of the argument he fell on. The main bone of contention with this from Orion, though, was in Schwarzenegger's immensely well-executed villain status throughout the entire movie. Sure, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*'s recent release had since proven that the Model 101 T-800 was a class of *Terminator* movie fans could root for and rally behind, but there was barely an inkling of emotion seen from Arnie's portrayal in the original movie.

After all, so much time had passed that it seemed strange to David and the team why Orion would necessarily want to go back to this more menacing portrayal of a character who was now iconic. Plus, wouldn't playing as a human in a world full of awesome killer robots somewhat diminish *The Terminator*'s core appeal? Schwarzenegger was, just like the movies, set to be plastered all over the game's box art, after all. One can help that this would have been an issue easily solved had Orion moved faster to get a game based on the original film out closer to 1984, instead of a substantial period after the supercharged, more successful sequel.

Why didn't this end up being the case? David has a theory. "Because in those days, the movie studios didn't take videogames seriously," he says. "They were considered 'licensing', so they would do coffee cups, T-Shirts, notepads and videogames." According to him, it simply didn't matter if a videogame was a year or two late (or possibly even longer, as was the case with *The Terminator*) since to Orion Pictures it was seen purely as just another avenue in which to cash in on a movie's success and rampant popularity. "They were all the same



› [Mega Drive] Kyle confronts the Terminator's endoskeleton while traversing Cyberdyne's factory.

» [Mega Drive] David might have been largely restrained by following the movie's events, but there was still room for some creative enemy design.

thing." The reason for why Orion didn't want people to play Arnold Schwarzenegger's ominous role soon became clear. "Everyone (including me) wanted to play the game as the Terminator," David emphasis, "but they told us they didn't have the rights to put Arnold in the game." Welcome to the early days of videogame licensing, it would seem. "They had only one image of him that we could use for the box art. So who do we play then? Sarah Connor? Sorry, you can't be Sarah either, we don't have the rights to Linda Hamilton. So who do we play in the game? Spoiler alert: Kyle Reese, the dude that dies in the movie."

Probe Software may have found out the hard way that, with videogame tie-ins, certain restrictions need apply. That said, it didn't stop David and a small group of creatives to develop a playable version of Cameron's sci-fi vision that felt ripped right out of the movie. Players were indeed saddled with playing as destined-to-die resistance soldier Kyle Reese, but in the game's opening level alone Probe Software found a way to surpass pre-established expectations. Because while the 1984 film may have begun in present day, being placed into the shoes of Reese meant being able to drop players right into the throes of the bleak future war setting only glimpsed briefly on the big screen.

It may not have been the exact scenario the development team envisioned, but across four sprightly levels *The Terminator* ended up as a faithful translation of the source material. It didn't hurt, either, that the Mega Drive was a console known for producing amazingly crisp sound and visuals for the era, which

» [Mega Drive] Multiple Terminators will flank you on the left and right if you don't move fast in the game's opening chapter.

» [Mega Drive] Your first encounter with Arnie's Terminator occurs in Tech Noir. He can't be killed, only temporarily stunned by gunfire.

helped somewhat offset the tight turnaround time Probe Software was working under. Recognisable locations like the Tech Noir nightclub (where Reese first finds Sarah Connor), the LA downtown city streets, and the climactic sequence's automotive factory are all faithfully recreated, as you constantly fend off the ferocious T-800 that keeps on getting back up.

> "IF WE HAD MORE TIME AND A BIGGER CARTRIDGE WE COULD HAVE DONE EVEN MORE"
> DAVID PERRY

Despite David's preference "to be on a mission to find Sarah, and to have the police and Kyle trying to stop me" while playing as the Terminator, the 1992 game captured the essence of the movie. And just because *The Terminator* was a tie-in title – admittedly one eight years too late – didn't mean that he and the team didn't find room to innovate on a technological front. With regards to the game's bench-pushing graphics, he credits comrade Nick Bruty. "The guy is an incredible artist and won countless awards," says David. "The images in-game were quite groundbreaking as they were actually photos of humans instead of animations. Poor Nick had to scan and edit lots and lots of photos to get the characters to move." Turns out this was something all could get involved in, too. "We acted as the characters in the game in my mother's back yard, including Neil Young our producer."

Another element of note is of course the game's soundtrack. Because whereas Brad Fiedel's iconic *Terminator* theme, in which the melody is backed up by the distinct clanging of metal (aimed to replicate the idea of a Terminator's heartbeat), Probe Software knew it wouldn't be enough to repeat this ad infinitum. This led audio lead Tommy Tallarico, who at the time was based across the pond, to create a distinct track for each stage, squeezing every ounce of bass the Mega Drive's Yamaha YM2612 sound chip could muster. The result was a synth-infused cacophony of original beats, which fit neatly into the movie's existing musical themes. "When I moved to America, I got to meet [Tommy]," reveals David. "He really cared about the audio for that game."

The Terminator for the Mega Drive might have been a slightly compromised effort before it really got started, but it still served to highlight the calibre of licensed games Probe Software could achieve when given the right resources. Looking back, it was very much a testing bed for the games the studio would make later, proving its adaptation prowess before going onto make more – including what many consider to be the superior version of Disney's *Aladdin* (also on Mega Drive). David Perry's next step would be to establish Playmates Interactive soon after moving to California, forming the basis of what would become Shiny Entertainment and therefore *Earthworm Jim*.

It was, however, *The Terminator* that empowered David and friends to make strides during the still burgeoning 16-bit console era. Just like how James Cameron sought to expand the world of sci-fi for him and countless others with the release of *The Terminator*, it was always Probe Software's intention to do the same in game form. "It's really what games are all about, expanding worlds," he concludes. "If we had more time and a bigger cartridge we could have done even more. It's such a fun world to explore."

Neo Geo CDZ

» **MANUFACTURER:** SNK » **YEAR:** 1995
» **COST:** ¥39,800 (launch), £400+ (today, boxed), £375+ (today, unboxed)

Though the Neo Geo CD was never going to outsell cheaper machines capable of displaying 3D graphics, its accurate versions of popular arcade games ensured that it would be of some interest to gamers of the mid-Nineties. The only problem was that those games were becoming increasingly complex. While some early games could load completely in 30-40 seconds, a more modern game like *Super Sidekicks 3* had multiple loading breaks between menu screens and matches, some of which could take almost a full minute to complete.

The Neo Geo CDZ was SNK's attempt to combat that problem. It is smaller than both the front-loading and top-loading Neo Geo CD models, is grey in colour rather than black, and retains RGB SCART, S-Video and composite output. Other than the faster CD-ROM drive and a new control chip for it, the CDZ features no hardware upgrades or indeed downgrades. That upgrade is a major one though, as the CDZ can almost halve the loading times of games compared to its predecessors – crucial for later fighting games, which often featured multiple loading breaks. As a result, it is the most sought after of the three Neo Geo CD systems. ✱

Neo Geo CDZ fact

■ Unlike the top-loading Neo Geo CD, which was released internationally, the Neo Geo CDZ was only released in Japan. The system isn't region locked though, so your American games will work fine.

PROCESSORS: 16-BIT MOTOROLA 68000 (12 MHZ), 8-BIT ZILOG Z80 (4 MHZ)

RAM: 7 MB RAM (2MB PROGRAM MEMORY, 4MB GRAPHICS MEMORY, 1MB SOUND SAMPLE MEMORY)

GRAPHICS: UP TO 384 SPRITES (128 PER PLANE), 4,096 COLOURS ON SCREEN FROM 65,536 PALETTE, 320X224 RESOLUTION

AUDIO: CD AUDIO, YAMAHA YM2610 SOUND CHIP

STORAGE: 2KB BUILT-IN SRAM

MEDIA: 650MB CD-ROM

ESSENTIAL GAME

Real Bout Fatal Fury 2: The Newcomers

The last traditional entry in SNK's *Fatal Fury* series is a great example of why the Neo Geo CD is so appealing. At £50 it is cheaper than its MVS and AES counterparts, has a rather great CD soundtrack and it's the only contemporary home conversion of the game. Sadly the loading times can get a bit onerous on the regular hardware due to the large amount of animation data that is used for each fighter, and that's where the Neo Geo CDZ comes in – cutting the duration of those intermissions makes the experience considerably more enjoyable.

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

ULTIMATE GUIDE

THE MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM

SNK VS. CAPCOM

WHEN TWO FAMOUS FIGHTING GAME BRANDS FIRST CLASHED, NOBODY EXPECTED IT TO BE ON A HANDHELD – AND NOBODY EXPECTED IT TO BE QUITE SO BRILLIANT. WE TAKE A LOOK AT HOW THE FIRST FIGHTER IN THIS COLOSSAL CROSSOVER SERIES BECAME AN INSTANT CLASSIC

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

From the surprising beef between *Guilty Gear* and *BlazBlue* fans to *Dead Or Alive* creator Tomonobu Itagaki's relentless jabs at *Tekken* over the years, it's plain to see that rivalries are inevitable when you're dealing with a genre as inherently adversarial as fighting games. When it comes to fighting game rivalries, there is none more storied than the competition between Osaka-based developers Capcom and SNK, the two companies that emerged as the leading developers of the arcade fighting boom of the Nineties. This wasn't just a case of fanboys at war – you could see little digs being made in games, with Dan Hibiki's outright mockery of the *Art Of Fighting* series being the most obvious.

Takashi Nishiyama is central to that rivalry. Having directed *Street Fighter* at Capcom, he didn't participate in the development of *Street Fighter II*, having left for SNK where he headed up the spiritual successor *Fatal Fury*. Late in the Nineties, he had a lunch with his opposite number at Capcom, Yoshiki Okamoto, and suggested that the two companies work on a crossover project. The two men convinced their bosses, and the stage was set for an epic clash. *SNK Vs Capcom: The Match Of The Millennium* is the second result of that project, the first being the excellent *SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighters Clash*.

The key attraction of this game, of course, is the option to pit SNK's strongest against

» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] Vega and Billy Kane will ambush you in the story, but you can't fight as or against either.

» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] Background details are often impressive like the orchestra playing as you fight in the Germany stage.

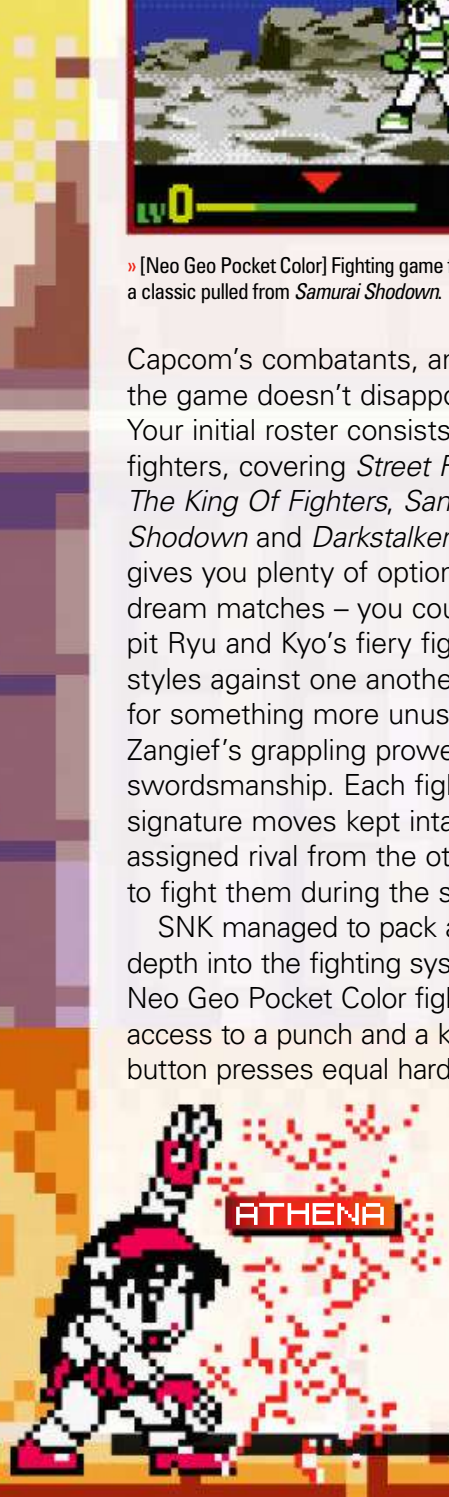
» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] Fighting game fans will recognise this beach stage as a classic pulled from *Samurai Shodown*.

» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] Geese has teamed up with M Bison, so naturally Terry Bogard has to get involved.

Capcom's combatants, and the game doesn't disappoint. Your initial roster consists of 18 fighters, covering *Street Fighter*, *The King Of Fighters*, *Samurai Shodown* and *Darkstalkers*. That gives you plenty of options for dream matches – you could pit Ryu and Kyo's fiery fighting styles against one another, or go for something more unusual like testing Zangief's grappling prowess against Haohmaru's swordsmanship. Each fighter has their various signature moves kept intact, and each has an assigned rival from the other side who will pop up to fight them during the single-player game.

SNK managed to pack an astonishing amount of depth into the fighting system, too. As with other Neo Geo Pocket Color fighters, you only have access to a punch and a kick button, so longer button presses equal harder hits. Beyond that, nothing is cut down. Advanced mechanics like throw escapes and guard meters are included. You can choose to fight in one-on-one bouts or *King Of Fighters*-style team trios, but the most impressive mode is the tag-team mode in which teams of two fighters can swap places on command. For context, the PlayStation conversion of *Marvel Super Heroes Vs Street Fighter* launched in the same year, and could only handle tag-team matches if both players picked the same team. To see a fully featured tag mode on any system was still a novelty, never mind a handheld console.

There are also three different fighting styles to choose from. Average gives you a Capcom-style super meter with two levels of charge, plus access to a knockdown recovery move, as well as forward dashes. If you choose Counter you'll get an SNK-style super gauge that must be manually charged, plus the ability to dodge moves. At low life, you can perform unlimited level one super moves or level two super moves with a full gauge. Finally, Rush gives you the ability to stock three super moves, but only at level one. You can also run and do quick knockdown recovery. The main allure of this mode is the ability to perform chain combos like those in the *Darkstalkers* series, starting from light attacks and moving to heavy.



LINK UP

NO LESS THAN FOUR GAMES CAN LINK UP TO MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM – HERE'S WHAT THEY DO

THE KING OF FIGHTERS: DREAM MATCH 1999

If you've got the rare Dreamcast to Neo Geo Pocket Color link cable, you can receive data from this confusingly named conversion of *The King Of Fighters '98*. Once you have 100 points for a character in the Dreamcast game, you can upload their data to the handhold game to receive a variable number of Olympic mode points.

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS CLASH

If you've got a spare Neo Geo Pocket Color and a link cable, your progress in this non-fighting crossover can help you out with the fighting game. When you link the two games together, you'll make some progress on unlocking characters in *Match Of The Millennium*, with the amount depending on how complete your card collection is.

SNK VS CAPCOM: THE MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM

Of course this game can link to other copies of itself! Brilliantly, the game offers full fight functionality via link cable, so whether you want a one-on-one fight, a tag match or a trios battle, you're in luck. The action is squarely focused on fighting though, you won't find any options to trade points or Olympic mode records.

CAPCOM VS SNK: MILLENNIUM FIGHT 2000

Another one for Dreamcast owners here. You can send your Olympic mode points to the Dreamcast for the purpose of unlocking secret items. This is really useful as you can gather points much more quickly in the handheld game. There's also an option to receive points on the handheld, but that's a pretty inefficient way of doing things.

MINIGAMES

THE FOUR SPECIAL MINIGAMES THAT YOU'LL PLAY TO UNLOCK SPECIAL MOVES

BLADE ARTS

■ You take control of Jubei Yagyu from the *Samurai Shodown* series, who must cut down straw dolls as they appear. A and B slash left and right, and you'll need to hold the thumbstick up to strike the ones the come from the ceiling. Prioritise red and green targets, as they're worth more points than the standard yellow ones.

CAT WALK

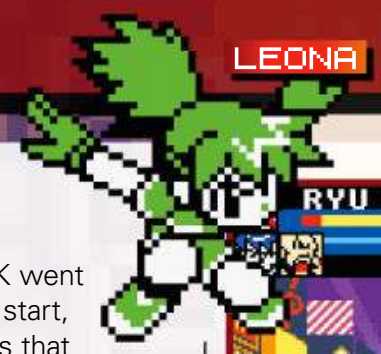
■ This is a rhythm action minigame starring Felicia – the only minigame star to also appear as a playable fighter in this game. You've got six tunes to pick from, and you just have to match your button presses to the commands as they rise up the screen.

GHOST TRICK

■ This excellent little minigame stars Arthur from the *Ghosts 'N Goblins* series. You've got to hop between platforms with A and B to collect treasure and score points. This is complicated by Red Arremer, who will pop up at random in the gaps between the platforms to block your way. Get hit or run out of time, and that's it.

TARGET 9

■ Playing as the amazing Marco Rossi from *Metal Slug*, your job here is to blast the Mars People out of the sky. The screen is divided into nine segments that you can shoot at, and you've only got six bullets available before you need to reload. The Mars People can shoot back too, so you can be defeated before the time runs out.



If that was all there was to it, it would have been one of the best handheld fighters of its era. But SNK went far, far further with the game. For a start, there are eight unlockable characters that you can earn. Each run through Tourney mode will remove panels covering a portrait of a hidden fighter, and once you've fully revealed the fighter you can select them as normal. These fighters include the game's four bosses and a couple of extra popular characters from each side. Every fighter also has an unlockable super move that you can buy in the shop, from Guile's Crossfire Assault to Geese's Deadly Rave.

» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] You can see the pain all over Kyo's face as Ryu picks him up and throws him.

How do you earn currency to buy those moves, you ask? That all takes place in Olympic mode. Each team has its own coach and three standard fighting variations, as well as two special minigames that we've covered in the Odd Olympics boxout. In Survival, you'll see how you can fare against 100 opponents. Time Attack challenges you to smash through five opponents as quickly as possible, and First Blast is essentially a series of sudden death duels. Depending on your performance, you'll earn an award and points towards unlocking goodies – and even if you've finished with this game, they're still useful elsewhere – more on that in the Hyper Link boxout.

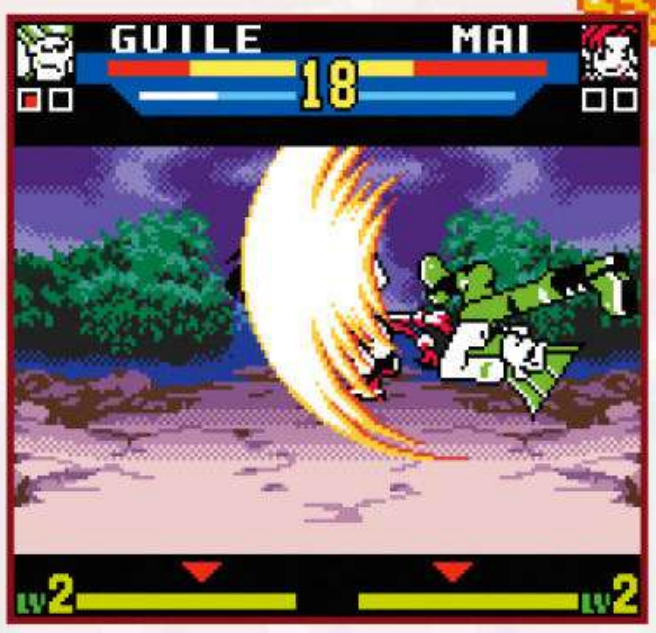
Visually, the game is a treat relative to its handhelp peers. The sprites have all been drawn in the same style as the *King Of Fighters* games for the system, which means you should expect big heads with really expressive faces, plus exaggerated limb movements. Fighters are drawn with limited palettes – typically just black, white and a single colour – but this is standard for fighting games on the system. Famous backgrounds like Terry's train stage from *Fatal Fury 2* and the Great Wall Of China stage from *Street Fighter Alpha* are included, and the music is also drawn from classic games, with the sound chip doing its best to recreate music from games as diverse as *Samurai Shodown* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3*. The game's many

» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] Your final boss is either Orochi Iori or Evil Ryu, depending on whether you're on the Capcom or SNK route

» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] Athena's using the Counter fighting style here, and is charging up her super gauge

» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] First Blast is a fun little mode for when you've only got a minute or two to spare.

» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] Classic moves such as Guile's Flash Kick can look quite spectacular on the small screen.



» [Neo Geo Pocket Color] Characters sometimes have special fight openings if they have an established connection with each other.

cutscenes are also worth mentioning, as they feature fantastic artwork.

***SNK Vs Capcom: The Match Of The Millennium* was released late in 1999.** Bizarrely, although a few UK magazines regularly covered Neo Geo Pocket Color games, none of them reviewed this one. American critics were full of praise for the game, though. In *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, Che Chou praised the tag-team fighting and stated that he "never even dreamt this was possible on a handheld console", and awarded the game 9/10. The three other reviewers in the magazine gave it 9/10, 9/10 and 8/10. Craig Harris reviewed the game for IGN and gave it 10/10, noting that the minigames are small but

"add so much to the replay value of this fighting cartridge". James Mielke of GameSpot scored the game 9.4/10 and declared it "undoubtedly the greatest handheld fighting game to date".

When you play *SNK Vs Capcom: The Match Of The Millennium*, it's easy to tell that SNK wanted this crossover project to be something truly special. The game set a new bar for handheld fighting games, both in the depth of its fighting engine and the amount of content players could expect. But more than that, it's a love letter to the fans, packing in cool details and references that you'll have a great time spotting. The arcade *Capcom Vs SNK* games are undoubtedly great, but they shouldn't overshadow this handheld gem – not only did it do the crossover first, but it did it brilliantly.

[illegible]

MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM IS FULL OF COOL LITTLE EASTER EGGS – HERE ARE A FEW NOTABLE ONES

NASTY NAKORURU

■ If you select Nakoruru's alternate colour by holding the A button on the character select screen, her whole attitude will change, with new victory art and some condescending win quotes. This reflects her appearance in *Samurai Shodown III*, where her Slash and Bust forms have totally different personalities.

ABSENT CHAMPION

■ Set a personal best in an Olympic event and your character will stand proudly atop the podium. The exception is Ryu. If you set a record with *Street Fighter*'s main man, M Bison and Sagat will be left alone on the podium with the top spot empty – just like in Ryu's *Street Fighter II* ending.

FEISTY FIO

■ You don't really see your character during a game of Target 9, but it's possible to change it anyway. Press Option after you've entered the mode, but before the game starts properly, and you'll hear the reload sound. Your life bar icon changes to that of Fio, and she'll be represented on the records screen.

CAT STUFF

■ What do cats love? Well, they chase mice, they eat fish and sometimes they wear bells. If you select your track in Cat Walk mode with the Option button instead of A, the regular icons will be replaced with – you guessed it – mice, fish and bells. Felicia also wears her alternative orange colour.

ART ATTACK

■ *SNK Vs Capcom: The Match Of The Millennium* isn't compatible with the monochrome Neo Geo Pocket. However, there's nothing stopping you from trying to play it – and if you do, you'll be greeted with a compatibility notice featuring a piece of cool crossover art. There are a few, so try it multiple times!

» [Switch] *Dark Arms: Beast Buster 1999* definitely provides some variety compared to the other games available.

SNK VS CAPCOM: THE MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM

WE SPEAK TO SNK ABOUT HOW SNK VS CAPCOM: THE MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM AND OTHER GAMES ARE FINALLY BEING BROUGHT BACK FOR MODERN AUDIENCES

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

***SNK Vs Capcom: The Match Of The Millennium* was released for another system for the first-time ever in February 2021, arriving on the Nintendo Switch as part of a wider drive to make the Neo Geo Pocket Color library available to players today.** The game was initially available as a stand-alone digital release, before being bundled together with nine other games in the *Neo Geo Pocket Selection Vol 1* compilation, and has since been released on PC as well. Although the options to link to Dreamcast games have naturally been omitted, the game does offer local multiplayer match-ups so you can enjoy fierce fighting with your friends.

SNK hasn't always paid much attention to its handheld library, certainly compared to the arcade games that it has made readily available across a variety of formats, so we wanted to know why now is the right time to revisit it. Adam Laatz, the SNK producer handling the *Neo Geo Pocket Color Selection* project, has fond memories of the Neo Geo Pocket. "I was in middle school at the time, so I could not afford the Neo Geo back in the day. I think the great thing about Neo Geo Pocket was making a lot of these games a little bit more accessible to the audience," he says, before explaining the drive behind the project. "I think for portable gaming, you see systems like the Analogue Pocket, I think there's definitely been a resurgence of retro gaming. I think [it's] for preserving our legacy, not just for the arcade with Neo Geo AES and MVS, but for this system as well."

"I think that the main reason was the Switch. It's easy to use, and you have the handheld mode," adds Lionel Ackah, project director at SNK. "The Neo Geo Pocket wasn't available for a lot of people. And nowadays, if you want to get the real game in your hands, you have to pay a lot of bucks to get it, it's pretty rare. It was good timing, we thought, to bring back the NGPC collection and to preserve the games, and also bring the long-time fans another chance to revive the experience from the past."

The team handling the emulation for this project is Code Mystics. "They are one of the best of the best, I think," says Lionel. "They've been kind of there from the start, going back to a lot of compilations on PS2 and Xbox," Adam explains. "We've worked with a lot of porting houses in the past, and we have a very good relationship with Code Mystics on multiple platforms. We knew for this project, making sure not only that the emulation was faithful but adding a lot of the additional features, we really could come up with collection and stand alone releases that exceed the user's expectation."

Indeed, quite a few additional features have been required – whether it's blocking off unusable modes like the Dreamcast link mode, or adding local multiplayer. "Adding in new features that weren't in the original game, editing certain areas, it's not very easy to hack the ROM and to make some of those changes," says Adam. "So I would say that is probably the biggest challenge for Code Mystics and our team." Another challenge is access to other archive material – things like box art and manuals that often get lost. "It depends on each game. Sometimes we still had the data, but it was on an old Mac. And they had an old hard drive, so we had to find an old connector to recover all the data. For some of them, we just took the game and scanned them and restored it."

One of the big surprises of this project was that the *SNK Vs Capcom* games were released at all, given the licensing involved. "It was definitely one of the exciting things of this project, to bring back some of the staff to help kick-start these talks again. When I joined the company, no communication was taking place," says Adam. "It's been great for this project to restart this relationship officially with Capcom. And we have to thank Mr Nakayama and Mr Tsuchiya from the *Street Fighter* team especially for their support, we would not have been able to have done it without them."

Adam is also keen to highlight the help of other external partners, such as Limited Run Games and Pix'n'Love. "Something we put a lot of time and effort into was making sure that the collector's editions for this release were really done in a nice fashion. Our colleagues over at SNK Entertainment really helped us a lot, they helped look at the *Collector's Edition*, both in Japan and in Europe. I think for our core fans and for this audience, the physical component is very, very important – to have a tangible product, something you want to show off on the shelf."

So what of the future of the series? "One thing we can say with the recent release of *Card Fighters Clash* is we're working on the next compilation. [The line-up] in terms of both first-party third-party titles is something we're seriously considering," he confirms. "Finding the right variety is important to us." So could we see more licensed games like *Sonic Pocket Adventure* or *Puzzle Bobble*? "We can't divulge any specific details, of course, it's confidential. But we can definitely say that these talks are ongoing," says Adam. Here's hoping they bear fruit.

» [Switch] Both of the Neo Geo Pocket *Metal Slug* games have been reissued, and they're both great.

» [Switch] Although we love the Neo Geo Pocket Color, we're pleased that more people can enjoy *Match Of The Millennium*.

POCKET PICKS

SOME OF THE BEST GAMES REISSUED IN THE NEO GEO POCKET SELECTION RANGE SO FAR

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS CLASH

Although the multiplayer functionality here is limited, this crossover card game is still a heck of a time – we easily put over 100 hours into the original before ever managing to play against another human. Familiar characters are beautifully represented, and the battle system is unique enough to please even card game veterans.

METAL SLUG: 2ND MISSION

Rather than trying to adapt one of the arcade games, this run-and-gun takes the tried-and-true *Metal Slug* gameplay and reshapes it to fit the handheld better. Stages are shorter, there's more platforming involved and the stage progression is non-linear. Compared to the first game, there's also more vehicle fun and sampled speech.

THE LAST BLADE: BEYOND THE DESTINY

If you want a great fighter and already have *Match Of The Millennium*, this is a worthy alternative. Like the crossover fighter, it's packed with content – it starts off as an adaptation of the first arcade game and grows into the second as you unlock characters. Plus, the original cartridge is now extremely expensive.

» [Switch] Remember when we thought *SNK Heroines* would be like *Gals Fighters* all over again?

A-TYPE

LINES-0

STATISTICS

033

049

032

037

025

036

025

Tetris

CONTROLLED SPIN

» NES » 1989 » NINTENDO R&D1

If you've been reading Retro Gamer for a while, you might have picked up on my fondness for multiplayer puzzle games. I've always been quietly competitive, and I truly believe that games like *Puyo Puyo 2* and *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* are just as thrilling as any *Tekken* or *FIFA* when two good players face off. But something that gets lost in the jokes about that is that when times are rough, I turn to playing puzzle games solo as a way to relieve stress. Few games can truly calm my nerves when I'm convinced that the world around me is out of control, but puzzle games give me the ability to create some order from chaos for just a little while.

Growing up with the Sega consoles, *Tetris* wasn't my first love, but like so many other people I think it's as close to a perfect game design as you can get – and that goes double when I'm searching for a puzzle game to create a sense of calm. The key to that is that it offers greater control and predictability than similar games. Once a game of *Columns* gets to a certain point, you will almost certainly start to inadvertently create chain reactions. In *Dr Mario*, the random virus placements are always a factor. In *Puzzle Bobble*, the slightest error in aim can result in a missed shot that ruins your entire game.

Tetris doesn't do anything like that. Because of the naive gravity model of the game, there are no unexpected consequences when you clear a line, and combined with the preview of your next piece you're easily able to plan your next move. Because your movements snap to a grid, you don't start to miss drops until you can no longer cope with the speed of the game. That's not to say that those other games are bad of course, but when all you want is a few moments of your life in which you feel like you're in control, these design factors start to matter a lot more than you might have considered before.

THE MAKING OF SHŌGUN TOTAL WAR

THE ARCHIVES OF TOTAL WAR ARE ALMOST AS LONG AS THE CENTURIES OF WARFARE THE SERIES HAS COVERED, BUT EVERY GREAT MILITARY CAMPAIGN HAS TO START SOMEWHERE. WE EXPLORE HOW SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR MARCHED INTO NEW TERRITORY AND LAID THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A FRANCHISE

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **» DEVELOPER:** CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
- **» RELEASED:** 2000
- **» PLATFORM:** PC
- **» GENRE:** STRATEGY

» [PC] The thrill of commanding your units to "charge!" never stops being thrilling, even now.

» Joss Adley was a UI designer on *Shogun: Total War*. He's now a lead design artist on the series.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ROME: TOTAL WAR (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2004

TOTAL WAR: SHOGUN 2
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2011

ALIEN ISOLATION
SYSTEM: PS4, VARIOUS
YEAR: 2014

» [PC] Later *Total War* games had a more visually impressive campaign map, but the original click-clack of placing units still remains satisfying.

» Nick Tresadern was an artist on *Shogun: Total War* and still works at Creative Assembly.

Winston Churchill might have once uttered the phrase, "History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it," but we can't help but think that it's better suited to the *Total War* series. After all, since its inception, it has handed the reins (or is that reigns?) of the most notable empires the world has known over to its players and said: "Here, you try." It's a franchise that has carried Creative Assembly from little-known work-for-hire studio developing sports titles for EA through to the big leagues with a studio now its own battalion in size and replete with its own on-site motion-capture facility.

Prior to the release of the very first *Total War* game, the small developer based in Horsham didn't dream of such an epic scale. Founded in 1987 by Tim Ansell before growing to a respectable small-sized team over the years, the studio had reached a point just before the turn of the millennium that it was ready to step out of the shadow of EA's sports games and take on a project of its own with the hopes of writing its own history. "During the mid-to-late-Nineties the PC market was full of *Command & Conquer* clones, which were selling well," explains Joss Adley of the early days of the game. "Tim saw an opportunity to start a new speculative RTS project in addition to the ongoing sport titles development."

This *C&C* inspiration might not sound so alien to a Nineties PC gamer, considering how explosive the genre's boom had been thanks to the likes of Westwood and Blizzard. Joss joined as a UI designer for the game, but remains at Creative Assembly even now as a lead design artist. He's been through it all with *Total War*. "The initial brief was a simple *Command & Conquer*-style RTS in a historical setting, underpinned by a rock-paper-scissors unit matchup: infantry, archers, cavalry," explains Joss, adding that the studio believed that the real historical setting would "make an interesting change from the standard sci-fi/fantasy fare" that was all too commonplace within the RTS genre.

While the real-time strategy genre was the starting point for its development, the references that were used were vast and varied. "Other games that we looked at for reference included

» [PC] Seeing all your little soldiers lined up and ready for battle gives child-like glee, as though they're little figures waiting to be smushed.

» [PC] Gruesome though it may sound, being such a master strategist in battle that it forces a dishonoured general into hara-kiri is just… *chef's kiss*

» [PC] Admit it, you're always a little bit proud to see just how many units you've slayed in a *Total War* battle…

> "THE SUCCESS OF SHOGUN WAS A PIVOTAL POINT FOR CREATIVE ASSEMBLY IN THAT WE NOW HAD A MANDATE TO CREATE NOT JUST ONE BUT A SERIES OF SEQUELS"
>
> **JOSS ADLEY**

Warhammer: Dark Omen by EA/Mindscape, as that too had battles moving units of (mostly) men around under unique banners," recalls Nick Tresadern, one of *Shogun: Total War*'s artists and now project art director on the series. "We also looked at an old Amiga game called *Lords Of The Rising Sun* which was based on 12th-century Japan and featured a campaign map that triggered battles when enemy armies met." Joss adds that the influences came from other places outside of videogames, too, such as the *Shogun* board game (which they had in the studio) and any sort of feudal Japanese medium. "Actually our main inspiration came from other sources: Kurosawa movies (*Seven Samurai*, *Ran*), the *Shogun* television series, numerous history and military reference books, which all gave us insight into this rich and fascinating time period."

And for a time, this was *Shogun: Total War*'s biggest innovation in a genre that was rife with it. Its unique historical setting – especially that of warring Japanese clans – meant some novel approaches to standard RTS mechanics, and paved the way for some fresh ideas. "The setting helped as it gave us a bunch of references to springboard from, as we were able to use kendo and iaido as a basis for melee combat," says Nick, adding, "we hired an

A WAR OF EXPANSION

TWO EXPANSION PACKS JOINED THE SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR CAMPAIGN

THE MONGOL INVASION

As one of the most fascinating time periods of global history, the invasion of the Mongols has been a cornerstone of the *Total War* series ever since this expansion was released. Here the big addition was the Mongol Horde, a playable faction in a new campaign whose purpose was to sweep across the islands of Japan and conquer them. Elsewhere it brought new units, new buildings and upgrades, new multiplayer modes and maps and – like all PC games of the era – a map maker and campaign editor. It was a solid package that did bring something new to the base *Shogun* game.

WARLORD EDITION

More of a repackaging than an outright expansion pack, the *Warlord Edition* of *Shogun: Total War* was a standalone version that brought with it the *Mongol Invasion* expansion pack and all its improvements, as well as a number of tweaks and improvements to AI and multiplayer. Interestingly, it did also provide a new introduction to the game, which was based on the Japanese movie *Ran*, which was one of the major influences for the original game.

THE ULTIMATE SHOGUN

GO FOR THE FLANKS

■ Easily the most important thing you can do to achieve success in *Shogun* is to attack from multiple sides. Simply sending your troops directly forward isn't going to cut it since the opposing army will just move backwards, tiring your forces out. Instead, send your troops from both sides (and preferably from behind) to reduce the space that your enemy can move.

GET IN POSITION

■ *Shogun* works in a weird way where if you click to attack an enemy unit, the AI will respond more directly to your action. The AI will still respond to any movements your own units make to ensure it remains safe, but avoid clicking 'charge' until you're truly ready otherwise you're going to end up with a whole lot of dead soldiers and that's not good.

LAY OF THE LAND

■ Utilising the terrain is crucial in *Shogun*, whether that's hiding in forests ready for an attack or leveraging the higher ground for the greater advantages it brings. Making sure to use these will give you and advantage, but remember that orchestrating an ambush will be tricky if you're the attacker and not defending.

iaido practitioner for the mo-cap shoots for the cutscenes' samurai characters and hired a Japanese tea lady to act for the geisha." This meant a lot more for the gameplay, too, since there was a breadth of new mechanics that could be brought over into the game from this very specific historical setting. Ninja units, for example, could be hired to assassinate your opponents and make any ensuing battles much easier. "Picking a mono-culture with all factions sharing the same small unit pool required less content and provided a clear rock-paper-scissors dynamic," explains Joss, which was naturally a boon for Creative Assembly and its finite resources at the time. "The Sengoku Jidai (the age of the country at war) was a turbulent period of near constant civil war and so translated well to a strategic wargame. It seemed like a really interesting time period in terms of rapid technological advancement, with Portuguese traders bringing firearms and spreading Christian doctrine."

» [PC] Managing the economy of the campaign map wasn't complex, but it did still need some careful planning and attention to succeed with.

The initial first challenge for the team was the implementation of this grand strategy campaign map, where players could move units about a *Risk*-style map to tactically plan their combat, build up their defences, manage their income and ultimately initiate combat. Likely inspired by the *Shogun* board game, this aspect of *Total War* was bringing a different spin on the typical RTS where strategic combat and economic management were usually woven together in the same space. "There was always the intention to have a turn-based strategic element underpinning the battles and providing context," says Joss, "and the *Risk*-style campaign gameplay remained a constant during development. There was some finessing and tweaking of the supporting mechanics such as diplomacy and agent actions along the way. From a technical point of view, the biggest challenge was the overheads of loading from one game to another." Joss adds that the team had dreamed of having a seamless loading transition from campaign map down into the reeds and the fields of the battlefield "with the camera swooping down on through a cloud layer and into the battlefield". While that dream didn't make it into the game, the two distinct but connected halves of the game complemented each other well. "From a design perspective, once we had the two halves functional and feeding into each other it felt great, a natural fit, it was just a matter of tuning the gameplay."

Shogun: Total War was a game of two halves, then, and it was already feeling like it could bring something new to the table by blending those two different parts. But development of the game began at a time when the hardware of gaming was changing, too, and PCs in particular were at the forefront. "Development of the game coincided

» [PC] The sense of panic and fear as you wait to discover if a ninja was successful or not is more than a little tense.

with the release of the first wave of graphics cards," explains Joss, "and we saw the potential in using a 3D spline grid to create undulating terrain." Originally *Shogun* had intended to have a top-down view just like any other RTS at the time, but in building 3D environments for the game a new opportunity appeared. "The lead coder, Anthony Taglione, was playing around with the camera settings one day," recalls Joss. "We realised that angling the camera towards the horizon not only looked cool but could offer new possibilities in terms of gameplay." This shift in perspective gave the game more of a 'boots on the ground' sort of feeling – which no RTS game had done before – and ultimately shifted the tone of the combat section quite dramatically. This was seen as the 'Commander's view', and from there the attitude towards how the player interacted with the combat maps changed too.

This was a big alteration for the game since it really brought a whole new way of playing real-time strategy, one that felt more authentic and real. Given the historical setting, it was clear that *Shogun: Total War* was leaning more towards realism than bombastic entertainment. "It opened up the possibility to bring in extra mechanics

HOW TO DEFEAT YOUR ENEMY

IN THE SHADOWS

■ Outside of battle, you can leverage some special units like the ninja to gain advantages on the battlefield. If you're anticipating a fight, just beforehand send in a ninja to assassinate the general of the army you're going to face. This will severely decrease morale and make the ensuing battle much easier to win for yourself.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

■ No war is won with one battle, and so you'll need to be smart about your campaign map strategy as well. Don't leave any of your regions without garrisons; don't keep all your units in one massive army; don't overspend on unit production. And remember, economic buildings are just as crucial as the military ones.

"OUR MAIN INSPIRATION CAME FROM OTHER SOURCES OUTSIDE OF GAMES: KUROSAWA MOVIES, THE SHOGUN TV SERIES, HISTORY AND MILITARY REFERENCE BOOKS"

JOSS ADLEY

» [PC] There wasn't as much emphasis on the historical side of the era as later *Total War* games, though a few pre-scripted campaigns offered a little part of it.

» [PC] If you see a map with a bridge, you're in for a tough time. Good luck getting past that blockade.

that we probably wouldn't have considered for say a sci-fi title," explains Joss, pointing to new combat elements such as morale, fatigue, hiding in cover, unit formations, routing and rallying, terrain advantage… "The list goes on," he says. "Many of these real-world mechanics translated surprisingly well to the battlefield gameplay." But it was important to keep the authenticity in check, *Shogun* wouldn't have been such fun if it was ardent about its attitude towards the realism of feudal combat. "We were careful not to go too far with it," recalls Nick. "On the Amiga there was a battle game called *Waterloo*, where playing as a general you would issue orders to your troops then would have to wait quite a while for them to go away to execute them and come back to tell you how it went and give you news that you'd then use to determine what your next orders for them were. This was considered too slow-paced and hardcore for what we wanted for *Shogun*."

And what more authenticity does such a game need than Sun Tsu's *Art Of War*, the famed book of military strategy? Creative Assembly leveraged the thoughts and findings of the book as a means of implementing the game's AI strategy, helping to design and shape the way real military strategists of the era might have thought and the battles might have actually played out. In the combat phase, this was seen in the ways that the AI attempted to flank or ambush you, or to lure you into weaker terrain or disadvantages. "Similarly, on the campaign side the enemy AI had an annoying tendency to retreat and defend where you were strongest and attack where your regions were undefended," reveals Joss. Some of the additions from the *Art Of War* were even more subtle than that, even, as Nick recalls, "If an army moved into a forest to hide, it would sometimes cause a flock of birds to be disturbed and fly out of the forest, and if the other player spotted those birds leaving a forest then that'd be a hint that an enemy unit is lying in wait in there. That comes from the Sun Tzu quote, 'The rising of birds in their flight is the sign of an ambuscade. Startled beasts indicate that a sudden attack is coming.'"

***Shogun: Total War* had expanded over the course of its development as a result of all these new additions, starting out as an extra little aside for the studio but ending up as a fairly major project that even got the backing from long-time partner Electronic Arts.** "We managed to get covers and six-to-eight-page articles in a few of the popular gaming magazines," says Nick, "which suggested that for what was originally to be just a niche game it was starting to show potential for a wider audience." And it did: releasing in June 2000 for Windows, *Shogun: Total War* sold in the hundreds of thousands, and was very well-regarded in the press and by its players. While it didn't dominate the charts like many of its predecessors did, *Shogun: Total War* was innovative, unique and compelling – it was something that helped to define what Creative Assembly was and what the team could do. "We started with a core dev team of seven, which had expanded to 15-20 people by the latter half of the project, still a laughably small amount by today's standards," says Joss, who continues to work on the franchise. "The success of *Shogun* was a pivotal point for Creative Assembly in that we now had a mandate to create not just one but a series of sequels, using the first title as a template. It's been a privilege to have been involved with *Total War* from day one, and to have been a part of its evolution over the years. Also it is incredibly rewarding to see those gameplay pillars we set all those years ago still holding strong today."

» [PC] "It's over Takeda, I have the high ground!"

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

GAMES THAT NEVER SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY

» [Dreamcast] Tail a damaged enemy and you can go into a chase mode to finish them off.

» [Dreamcast] A variety of real-world planes are included in *Propeller Arena*, such as the P-51 D piloted by Emily Williams.

PROPELLER ARENA

Dreamcast players had sky-high hopes for this multiplayer dogfight game, but real-world tragedy ensured it never left the runway

Words by Nick Thorpe

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:**
SEGA

» **DEVELOPER:**
AM2

» **SYSTEM:**
DREAMCAST

» **DUE FOR RELEASE:**
2001

» [Dreamcast] This city scene's similarity to New York was the primary reason the game was cancelled.

If you bought your Dreamcast because you couldn't wait to enjoy online multiplayer games, it would have been hard not to have been disappointed at the end of January 2001. The console had already been out for a year in North America and Europe by the time serious online support started rolling out in the last quarter of 2000, and then suddenly the system was being discontinued. Depending on which region you were in, *Phantasy Star Online* was either barely a week old or still yet to be released. Fortunately, there were still serious plans to expand the range of online games throughout 2001, with games such as *Daytona USA 2001*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Bomberman Online*, *Alien Front Online* and more.

One such game was a rare console exclusive production from AM2, an air combat game initially named *Propeller Head Online*. Makoto Osaki was at the helm as the game's director, having previously directed *Virtua Fighter Kids* and *Daytona USA 2*, and Yu Suzuki took the role of producer. The game was intended to be a real multiplayer showcase for the console, with split-screen battles for up to four players and online battles for up to six, with support for voice chat using the Dreamcast microphone. In typical AM2 fashion, the emphasis was firmly on fun, with dramatic dogfights prioritised over detailed simulation. By E3 2001, the named had changed to *Propeller Arena*.

Thanks to extensive preview coverage by IGN, we know a lot about the game's plot and characters. Taking place in the year 2045, *Propeller Arena* depicted the Aviation Battle Championship in which various pilots competed in dogfights using vintage planes from World War II. Contestants include a young pop singer taking part as a promotional stunt, an elderly Gulf War veteran with a reputation for picking off damaged fighters, and a narcissistic actor who is competing primarily for female attention. The game's eight stages include an airport, a city full of skyscrapers and even an active volcano. Each has plenty of power-ups to find, and layouts become ever more complex as the game progresses. Sega's Japanese and American branches collaborated on the punk-flavoured soundtrack, with the Japanese side supplying original tunes composed by Sachio Ogawa and Tomoya Koga, and the American side licensing in songs by the likes of Rise Against, Consumed and Mad Caddies.

All the preparations were made for *Propeller Arena*'s launch. Release dates had been announced, 4 October in Japan and an unspecified

ALTERNATIVE FLIGHTS

IRON ACES

2000, MARIONETTE

■ If you want World War II fighter planes on your Dreamcast, your options are rather limited. *Iron Aces* is more of a straight simulator with various missions, and doesn't really have the same focus on multiplayer that *Propeller Arena* would have had.

CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE

2003, FASA STUDIO

■ As an early Xbox Live game, this features a good few multiplayer options including regular dogfight and capture the flag modes. The game supports up to four players locally and 16 via system link, so the loss of original Xbox Live isn't a problem.

AFTER BURNER: CLIMAX

2006 , AM2

■ The next attempt at an air combat game from AM2 did make it to release, though it's obviously based on the Eighties arcade classic. Very few of the *Propeller Arena* staff actually worked on After *Burner: Climax* though, with most being sound producers.

» [Dreamcast] Your pilot will parachute to safety when downed, and your rival will insult you via radio.

» [Dreamcast] There are a variety of power-ups available in colour-coded crates, including this large bomb.

» [Dreamcast] Mastering tricks is essential to evading the accurate enemies in later stages.

» [Dreamcast] Extra characters are available to unlock when you manage to beat the single-player game.

September date for North America that may well have ended up being missed. Although Europe had lost out on many online games in 2001, *Propeller Arena* was confirmed for 9 November – albeit without its online functions. Printed advertising had already appeared, most notably on the manual for *Alien Front Online*, and preview builds were with the American press. IGN and GameSpot both felt positive, with the latter saying that, "*Propeller Arena* is shaping up quite nicely and looks to be a title action fans will want to pick up."

The game was complete, too – Makoto Osaki has shown a development GD-R disc showing that the build date of the final Japanese version was 11 September. This unfortunately coincided with tragic events in the USA, in which terrorists executed a co-ordinated plot to hijack passenger planes and crash them into various buildings, including the World Trade Center in New York. On 13 September, Sega announced that shipment of the game would be postponed. "Although the game content does not deal with terrorism in any way, it is possible for a determined individual to deliberately play the game in a manner that generates images similar to those we have seen on the news," the company explained in a press release. "We want to avoid causing any additional grief to those involved in this week's tragedy and feel this is an appropriate action."

Sega confirmed the cancellation of *Propeller Arena* at the Tokyo Game Show in October 2001. With a rapidly declining Dreamcast market and no clear indication of when the game could be released without causing offence, this was an understandable choice. Makoto Osaki caused some excitement by posting a photo of a packaged version of the game in 2019, but clarified that it was a printing test that would not actually work on a Dreamcast. The game was not ported to other consoles, and while no reason was given for that decision, it's safe to assume that the lack of established online services for other consoles at the time was a problem.

Though *Propeller Arena* never saw an official release, some of the original music created for the game was later re-recorded with new instrumentation and used in *Virtua Tennis 3*.

Thankfully, *Propeller Arena* hasn't been lost. Dreamcast fans were anxious to get hold of it for a few years and finally got their wish in 2004, when it was leaked to the internet. A higher-quality GDI version was later made available in 2021. Since the game will almost certainly never gain an official release, this is your best option for finding out what it would have been like for yourself. ✱

"The game was intended to be a real multiplayer showcase for the console with split-screen battles"

THE RESTORATION MASTERS

WHEN WE FAIL TO GET AN OLD PC GAME WORKING, MOST OF US EVENTUALLY ACCEPT THE LOSS AND MOVE ON; PERHAPS A SELECT FEW WILL PATCH THE GAME TO PLAY NICE ON MODERN SYSTEMS, BUT HOW MANY PEOPLE WOULD TRACK DOWN THE RIGHTS HOLDERS TO THAT GAME, CONVINCE THEM TO LET THEM REMASTER IT, AND FOUND A GAME STUDIO?

WORDS BY ROBERT ZAK

Back in 2012, Stephen Kick was travelling around Central America with his partner and future Nightdive Studios co-founder Alix. The couple, who met while working as character artists at Sony Online Entertainment, were burned out on the games industry, and hit the road in search of adventure and discovery.

As well as having all the mind-opening experiences that come with travelling through new lands and cultures, Stephen began to rediscover his passion for gaming. One evening, in the midst of a tropical storm in Guatemala, he and a new friend he met at a hostel decided – fittingly, given the setting – to boot up the original *Monkey Island*. "We started playing, and it was all the sights and sounds that I hadn't heard since 1997," he recalls. "It really made me fall in love with videogames again."

As the storm raged, giving Stephen and his friend an ongoing excuse to indulge their nostalgia, the pair decided to ramp up the horror. In the popular imagination, transformative experiences while travelling often come with the help of psychedelic cacti and shamans. And while Stephen doesn't deny that some experiences along those lines took place on his travels, in this case his great transformation would come via an old CD copy of *System Shock 2*.

The game didn't work on Stephen's notebook, which perhaps dampened spirits on that tempestuous night, but inspired him to find out who was holding the IP rights for the classic Looking Glass Studios game. "It led me down this rabbit hole of old articles using the Wayback Machine to read interviews and understand what happened in the last days of Looking Glass," he tells us. "It led me to an insurance company, Star Insurance Company, who needed to commercialise the IP to acquire the trademark."

> "IT LED ME DOWN THIS RABBIT HOLE OF OLD ARTICLES USING THE WAYBACK MACHINE"
> **STEPHEN KICK**

The circumstances were perfect. Stephen quickly convinced the company to allow him to fix and re-release the game. He raised the funds from friends and within a matter of months Nightdive Studios had been founded and the game was out on GOG and Steam by the summer of 2013. It was the simplest of remasters – essentially the original game with a community patch – but it laid the foundations for Nightdive.

Nightdive's next several releases would follow a similar pattern – compatibility fixes rather than full-on remasters. Adventure games like *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream*, *The 7th Guest* and *The 11th Hour* all got the Nightdive treatment, but after around a year the studio began to expand its ambitions.

In 2014, Nightdive brought on Larry Kuperman, who had worked as business development and sales manager for companies like GameStop and Stardock. Just as Stephen's love for old games stems from fond memories playing with his father, Larry's stems from playing them with his son, and the two hit it off right away when Larry called Stephen out of the blue to enquire about joining Nightdive.

"I was having a lot of trouble reaching out to some of the bigger players – Activision, Microsoft, anybody that had old IP that we wanted to eventually release," says Stephen. "When I met Larry for the first time at GDC that year, we hadn't even hired him and he said, 'OK, we've got a bunch of meetings today – one with Activision, one with Microsoft…' We were just like, 'OK, you're hired!'"

The next step was to get an engine designed to get the most out of older games. As would so often turn out to be the case, what Nightdive sought already existed in the modding

» [PC] The KEX Engine allows Nightdive to implement split-screen in games that didn't originally feature it.

» Stephen Kick (left) and Larry Kuperman have big plans for Nightdive Studios.

» [PC] Nightdive's work on *Blade Runner: Enhanced Edition* has gone quiet, but it reassures us it's still in development.

» [PC] One of Nightdive's first projects was to make the dark adventure game *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* work on modern systems.

» [PC] Nightdive's first major remaster was *Strife: Veteran Edition*, which instantly established the studio as restoration masters.

ANATOMY OF A REMASTER

SIDE-BY-SIDE SHOTS COMPARING NIGHTDIVE'S REMASTERS TO THE ORIGINAL GAMES

POWERSLAVE EXHUMED

PLAYSTATION

■ The PlayStation version has a more elaborate temple design, but you can't appreciate it because the outside space is too small.

SATURN

■ The Saturn version has a bigger outdoor space, but the temple design itself is quite basic compared to the PlayStation version.

PC

■ Nightdive's version has the best of both consoles and uses the PlayStation temple design, and offers the bigger outdoor space of the Saturn.

TUROK

N64

■ A thick wall of fog cuts off sightlines, making for a nasty (but effective) shock when an enemy comes running out of it.

PC

■ The fog still exists, but it's more gradual and distant, and the enemy is visible from much farther away, giving you a distinct advantage.

SYSTEM SHOCK

PC ORIGINAL

■ The original *System Shock* had that charmingly clunky Nineties UI that made the play screen but a small picture in the middle (this was partly done to save memory).

PC REMASTER

■ A big part of Nightdive's MO is to modernise UIs, and no game benefitted from this quite like *System Shock: Enhanced Edition*.

THE NIGHTDIVE WISH LIST

THE GAMES WE'D LOVE THE STUDIO TO REVISIT

OUTLAWS

■ Don't be a fool, Marshall! LucasArts' Nineties shooter was one of the best gosh-darn-tootin' games of its time, running on the nifty Jedi Engine and throwing you into some huge non-linear levels out in the Wild West. The game famously had a stunning orchestral score and some novel mechanics like fanning and sniper scopes. It would be a joy to play split-screen with a friend.

DEUS EX

■ Possibly the pinnacle of the Looking Glass Studios repertoire, it's kind of bizarre that the cyberpunk immersive sim never got an official remaster. Yes, we have the unofficial overhaul mod *Deus Ex: Revision*, but that deviates quite far from the game's original vision. Nightdive has a good relationship with designer Warren Spector, so is in a great position to revive it.

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 1+2

■ Nightdive is also good friends with *Ultima Underworld* creator Paul Neurath. The only version of these games currently on sale is the original version playable via DOSBox, so it could really use modernisation. And who knows, maybe Neurath has some cut content in the back of his mind that could make it into a remaster?

THIEF II: THE METAL AGE

■ One of the greatest stealth games of all time has received plenty of love from the modding community over the years, with some excellent patches and overhauls out there. Nightdive could harness the community's talents by including some of the most popular fan-made missions or even providing a custom map search tool within the game itself.

▶ community. James 'Quasar' Haley and Samuel 'Kaiser' Villarreal had been working on source ports and the KEX engine for years; they had brought *Doom 64* to PC in the form of *Doom64 EX*, and worked on unofficial remasters of *Strife* and *Turok*.

Nightdive hired the pair, who immediately got to work on *Strife* – Nightdive's most ambitious remaster up to that point. The new version would feature dynamic lighting and bloom, upscaled textures and widescreen support. This was also the first time that Nightdive began adding and reinstating content that didn't feature in the original game.

In *Strife*'s case, they added the Capture The Chalice multiplayer which was planned for the 1996 game but never made it into the final version, and added objective markers to the map. In an indicator of Nightdive's commitment to its work, *Strife*'s most recent update – which improves widescreen assets on the title and intermission screens – came out in December 2021, nearly eight years after the remaster's release.

Larry says that "the first iteration of *Strife* was, by our standards today, kind of rough", but back in 2014 remasters of this sort were virtually unheard of. While fellow remaster studio Beamdog was winning Nineties computer RPG gamers' hearts and minds with their *Enhanced Editions* of *Baldur's Gate I* and *II* in 2013, Nightdive instantly established itself as the FPS remaster wizards.

As Nightdive grew in confidence, the scope of its work expanded into things like AI improvements, new levels, and even reworking the design of existing levels. Its latest remaster, *PowerSlave Exhumed*, is a fascinating case in point, fusing the PlayStation and Saturn versions of the 1996 shooter. In one area, for example, Nightdive used the more elaborate temple facade from the PlayStation version of the game, but combined it with the vast exterior space of the Saturn version; the team used the

» [PC] The derpy final boss of *Turok* remains overpowered, but being able to see him from more than ten feet away definitely helps.

» [PC] Raptors gang up on a human in *Turok*, while we watch on with villainous amusement.

> "MODDERS ARE OUR FIRST STEP TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING WHAT MAKES A GAME SPECIAL AND WHY PEOPLE STILL CARE ABOUT IT"
>
> **STEPHEN KICK**

best design elements from both games while scrapping those that resulted from the meagre memory limitations of Nineties consoles. *Shadow Man Remastered*, meanwhile, contains three new levels, improved AI, and a rearrangement of levels so that they're ordered "as originally intended".

Nightdive brings up an important question about authorship: at what point is Nightdive's work crossing over from remastering and realising the original vision into implementing their own vision? It's a fine line that Stephen and Larry are acutely aware of. "We're very serious when we talk about the risk that we treat these games with respect, and we extend that respect," Larry tells us. Nightdive unearths cut content by following various breadcrumbs in the original game code, but also "whenever possible, we reach out to the original development team and get their input".

In *Strife*'s case, Nightdive of course worked with James and Sam, who literally knew the game inside-out having reverse-engineered its code for the source port. For *Shadow Man Remastered*, Nightdive worked with Tim Heywood, one of the original composers on the game. "He was very integral with the overall design and scope of the game," says Stephen, "and was able to provide a lot of information as to what got cut and how we could go best about restoring it."

But sometimes, tough judgement calls need to be made on whether certain aspects of an old game's design are relics of a bygone era that just don't fit modern sensibilities. The infamous fog from N64 shooter *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter*, for instance, which reduced lines of sight to no more than 50 feet, could be argued as part of the game's identity (after all, hearing the cackles of a velociraptor knowing they were lurking in the mist within leaping distance of you was a great way of ratcheting up tension). But with encouragement from rights-holder NBC Universal, the decision was made to push back the fog. "You couldn't have the level of detail that the original developers wanted with the larger field of vision – the hardware just wouldn't support it," says Larry. "So they said, 'OK, we're going to cheat. We're going to use the fog to narrow that field of vision, but we'll be able to provide the level of detail that we want.'"

Some level design was adjusted too. On the first level, a key item is hidden on a clifftop that many players would miss. "Sam rebuilt that area into an arena with the key in the middle and a number of enemies that you have to battle get introduced there as well – he turned that from something that caused frustration into an action puzzle."

By 2019, with lauded remasters of cult-classic shooters like *Blood* and *Turok 2* under its belt, Nightdive's efforts eventually caught the attention of Bethesda, which owns id Software and therefore the rights to shooters like *Doom*, *Quake*

» [PC] Development of the *System Shock* remake hasn't been easy, but the demo shows plenty of promise, and quite a few mutants.

» [PC] In the *System Shock* remake, Nightdive is streamlining and merging some of the original game's weapons.

» [PC] *System Shock: Enhanced Edition* impressively revived an outdated classic for the modern generation.

» [PC] *System Shock 2*, the game that started it all for Nightdive, is currently being remastered at the studio, with VR and co-op support.

» [PC] *Turok 2*'s most iconic boss emerges from the shadows of the past into a crisp HD-textured present.

and *Wolfenstein*. Nightdive had actually been trying to work with Bethesda for some time, but its opportunity finally came in 2020 when it was taken on to remaster *Quake* and *Doom 64* (a task made easier by the fact that Sam earned his modding stripes with *Doom64 EX* back in 2008).

For *Quake*, Nightdive worked with first-person shooter legend Kevin Cloud and MachineGames, who designed the vast majority of the new levels added to the game. The remaster also benefitted from Sam's ongoing improvements to the KEX Engine, which was now adding split-screen support to games that never had it in the first place. The remaster was a triumph, rocket-jumping *Quake* back into the public consciousness and instantly making it the most reviewed and best-rated *Quake* game on Steam.

Despite a present-day reputation that allows it to court major publishers and remaster the biggest IPs, Nightdive owes much of its success and talent to the modding community. From its earliest days, Nightdive has been seeking out people who were modding and refining old games not for remuneration, but for the love of gaming. There was Sam of course, but just a couple of weeks after the release of *System Shock 2* in 2013 another pillar of the modding community caught Stephen's attention.

"I saw these very detailed guides pop up on Steam that outlined all the different mods that you could download, all the fan patches that could be applied," says Stephen. "I reached out to the author, and that's how I met Daniel Grayshon, who essentially became our first employee." At first, Daniel was brought on to bolster those guides, but his deep understanding of the game quickly made him a key figure at Nightdive, "His love for the games directly translated to making our versions better, making them more in tune with what the modding community had built and expected.

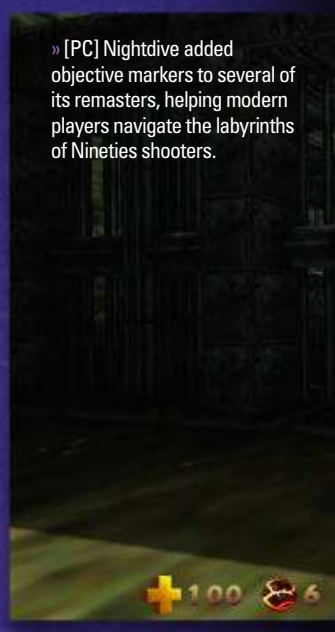
"Modders are our first step towards understanding what makes the game special and why people still care about it, because

» [PC] Nightdive's *PowerSlave* remaster plucks some art assets from the DOS version of the game, which was made in the Build engine.

» [PC] Not once did Shadow Man believe he'd get to exist amidst such beautiful shadows.

» [PC] *Quake Remastered* has a ton of new features, including split-screen and several new maps designed by MachineGames.

» [PC] With Sam Villarreal's extensive experience in bringing *Doom 64* to PC, Nightdive was ready when Bethesda came calling for a *Doom 64* remaster.



» [PC] Nightdive added objective markers to several of its remasters, helping modern players navigate the labyrinths of Nineties shooters.

IN FINE COMPANY

NIGHTDIVE ISN'T THE ONLY ONE DOING GOD'S WORK IN REMASTERING THE CLASSICS...

BLUEPOINT GAMES

■ In an impressive display of creative progress, Bluepoint started out remastering PS2 classics for the PS3, including the *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection* and the *God Of War Collection*. Eventually in 2018, it was granted its first remake – *Shadow Of The Colossus* on PS4 – before being tasked with the *Demon's Souls* remake for PS5, which could well be the best exclusive game for the console to date.

BEAMDOG

■ Canadian developer Beamdog works in something of a niche, but what a niche it is. The studio has remastered classic computer RPGs from around the turn of the millennium like *Baldur's Gate*, *Icewind Dale* and *Neverwinter Nights*. In 2016, it was even entrusted to make an official expansion for *Baldur's Gate*, *Siege Of Dragonspear*, which bridged the events of the first two games.

M2

■ Going strong for over 30 years, Japanese developer M2 has decades worth of experience in remastering and porting. It's responsible for all the Sega Ages titles, porting classic Sega games since 1996 up to this day. It has also brought the *Castlevania Anniversary* and *Advance* collections to all platforms, and did a beautiful job remastering *Legend Of Mana* in 2021. It was behind the Mega Drive Mini as well.

» [PC] Nightdive's remaster of *PowerSlave* fused the best elements of the PlayStation and Saturn versions of the game.

» [PC] One of Nightdive's upcoming projects is a remaster of the charmingly edgelordy Nineties shooter *SiN*.

TANTALUS MEDIA

■ Formed in 1994, Tantalus Media has become one of the go-to porting studios (it was behind *The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess HD*). Tantalus' resume took a big leap however when it made *Age Of Empires II* and *III: Definitive Editions*, helping the ancient RTS once again rule over the genre. Most recently it brought *Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword* to the Switch, complete with a new optional control scheme, as well as the original.

▶ ultimately they're the ones keeping these games alive for all this time."

Nightdive's attunement with the community and the original creators of its remasters has created plenty of opportunities that might not otherwise have happened. In early 2021, we were treated to incredible footage of Nightdive's upcoming *System Shock 2* remaster running in VR, followed closely by confirmation that a VR mode is indeed planned for the game. This – like so many of Nightdive's inspirations – is happening because a VR developer reached out to the studio.

"They gave us a little pitch, showed us what it could be like, and we were very impressed," says Stephen. "So we decided to bring them on to develop it fully while we completed the *Enhanced Edition*. The way the HUD is integrated into the gameplay makes it really suited for VR." With the KEX Engine now being built out to support VR, it opens up the possibility of featuring in future Nightdive remasters.

> "AS A DEVELOPER, YOU CAN BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND CERTAIN THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER DO WHEN DEVELOPING A GAME, BUT AS DEEPLY AS YOU UNDERSTAND THOSE THINGS, THEY WILL CREEP UP ON YOU"
>
> **STEPHEN KICK**

But as ambitions increase, so does the height of the bar the studio needs to leap over. And no bar has proven higher for Nightdive than making its first game from the ground up – a modern remake of the original *System Shock*.

Since its successful Kickstarter all the way back in 2016, which exceeded its $900,000 funding goal, the game has been pushed back, moved from Unity to Unreal Engine, and its development was effectively restarted after a couple of years. For Stephen, the long-running project marks his first in the role of director, and has proven to be an eye-opening but tough learning curve.

"As a developer, you can begin to understand certain things you should never do when developing a game, but as deeply as you understand those things, they will creep up on you," Stephen says. "One of those cardinal sins is switching engines mid-development."

"And if people wondered whether that was really a cardinal sin, we went out of our way to prove that it was." Larry adds. Another reason for the game's protracted development has been Nightdive's desire to stick to the philosophy that birthed the studio in the first place. Even though it's a remake, allowing for a lot more creative discretion and interpretation, Stephen felt that the game was drifting too far from the vision of the original. "We had a very talented group of people working on it who wanted to put their own imprint on it," says Larry. "Well, at a certain point you go past enhancing the original to changing it. When our backers began to say, 'This is not what we want,' it required not just a change in direction, but in fact largely a change in team."

Now, five years on from the fateful engine change and project restart, the complications it caused seem to finally be in the past, and Nightdive is confident that the game is on track. Its inclusive approach to development has even attracted *System Shock* veterans Warren Spector and Paul Neurath to offer their sage advice. Larry describes the pair as "friends of the Nightdive family", while Stephen elaborates that "we have shared what we're doing [on *System Shock*] with both Paul and Warren and we've always sought out and asked for their input. They have been great in providing that".

Stephen reassures us that at this point, "In terms of narrative, level structure and enemies, the DNA of our project is very much rooted in the original game."

The process has not been easy for Nightdive, as the studio has had to come to terms with the drastically upscaled rigours of creating a game based on a classic, and facing the concerns of financially invested fans. But few studios have accrued goodwill quite like Nightdive over its short ten years of existence, and few understand *System Shock* quite like it; this is, after all, the series that gave birth to the studio.

Even as Nightdive powers through its greatest challenge, it has delivered some of its most outstanding remasters yet. So perhaps we owe a little patience to a studio that has so often surprised us with revivals of games long thought lost, and continues to create the conditions for new players to enjoy games that defined many of our childhoods.

Monster Rancher 1&2 DX™

NOW CELEBRATING ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY, KOEI TECMO'S CLASSIC MONSTER-REARING SERIES IS BACK IN THE FORM OF A DOUBLE PACK OF REMASTERS. WE SPEAK TO KAZUMI FUJITA TO FIND OUT HOW THE GAMES HAVE BEEN ADAPTED FOR A NEW AUDIENCE

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** KOEI TECMO
- **» DEVELOPER:** KOEI TECMO
- **» RELEASE:** OUT NOW
- **» PLATFORM:** SWITCH, PC
- **» GENRE:** LIFE SIMULATION

» [PC] Let's be honest, that dragon looks like a boss fight. We don't fancy Mocchi's chances.

» [PC] Going on an expedition is a good way to find items that help you rear your monster.

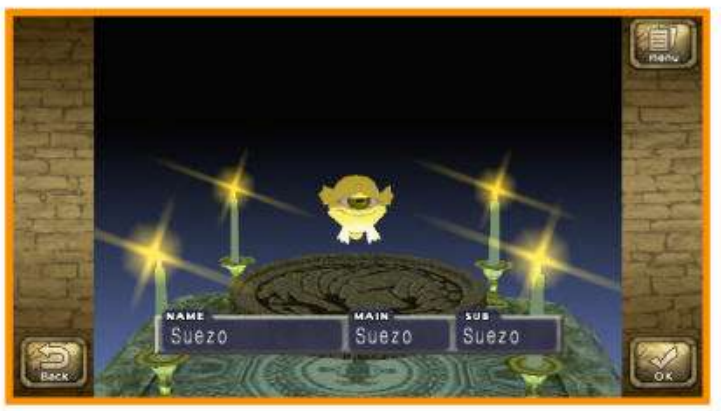
Many players like to feel a little bit of ownership over their experience with a game, and there are few better ways to give them that than to give them the opportunity for personalisation. Some players spend hours obsessing over their created character's clothing, others proudly share their painstakingly created stages. Any way to reflect your own personality can theoretically create attachment, and back in 1997 *Monster Rancher* allowed PlayStation owners to apply that concept to the life simulation genre.

Originally released as *Monster Farm* in Japan, the first game in the series introduced the core concepts of raising monsters, battling rivals and eventually breeding new hybrids. This game later made its way to North America as *Monster Rancher*, and its success ensured the production of a sequel and an anime adaptation. Two years later *Monster Rancher 2* arrived, and since this was the first game in the series to be released in Europe, it was released simply as *Monster Rancher*. The sequel expanded the range of monsters considerably over the original and was similarly well-received and popular, so various further sequels and spin-offs appeared on the PS2, Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance. However, the series eventually petered out, with *Monster Rancher DS* being the last console release for many years.

But that has all changed now, as Koei Tecmo has recently remastered the first two games and released them in a double pack. "Approaching the 25th anniversary of the *Monster Rancher* series in 2022, we received a lot of feedback from fans asking us to bring back the franchise," says executive producer Kazumi Fujita, explaining the decision to revisit the series. "After we released the ports of *Monster Farm* and *Monster Farm 2* in Japan, a lot of younger players really enjoyed the game as well. This was our inspiration for bringing back these two titles to the rest of the world, and I am looking forward to seeing an even bigger audience enjoy both games with the worldwide release of *Monster Rancher 1 & 2 DX*."

These are remasters rather than full remakes, so you should expect an experience that is close to that of the original games. However, that's not to say that nothing has changed. "When going back and revisiting the *Monster Rancher* series, I decided I wanted to create a powered-up version of the original titles that utilised all of the feedback we received from fans since the initial launch of both games back in the Nineties," says Fujita. "Some of the new features we've added include a new memo feature to utilise while raising monsters and a high-speed mode. You can also buy several items at once, and we've added other subtle adjustments to make the controls in the game feel better than ever."

» [PC] Durahan's life total isn't looking great, but he's scored a hit and has the guts to go again.



» [PC] Congratulations, you've made a Suezo! Actually, that's a pretty common outcome, don't be too impressed.

» [Switch] There's a noticeable resolution bump to the 3D graphics, but the textures remain low resolution.

The central idea of training and battling monsters wasn't unique to *Monster Rancher*, of course – the game arrived almost a year and a half after *Pokémon* launched on the Game Boy, and the month after the arrival of the first Digimon virtual pet. *Monster Rancher* needed something to differentiate itself from the competition, and this is where the personalisation aspect of the game appears. *Monster Rancher* allowed you to use your CD collection to generate new monsters, with over a dozen types and subtypes, and unique stats. There was a great pleasure to be had in discovering that a favourite album could generate a formidable monster, but if it didn't you could have a sneaky rifle through your parents' music to see if you could get anything better out of Tom Jones or The Beatles. You could even get totally unique monsters using certain CDs, some of which included other Tecmo games. If you've ever searched for the perfect tin of beans for your Barcode Battler, you'll quickly understand this as a much more elaborate version of the same concept.

However, in the present day where music is commonly streamed and optical media drives are increasingly rare, a like-for-like implementation of this feature isn't possible. "We developed a brand-new system to meet the needs of the current generation of players, so that they can still enjoy the game and experience all the fun it has to offer without having to use actual CDs," says Fujita.

"This new system consists of an original database including roughly 600,000 songs, which allows anyone to choose whichever song they like. I feel this has only increased how much fun you can have obtaining monsters this time around. I want to ensure we bring all of the same fun players had with the original version, while also giving them a new powered-up experience." Indeed, you have more freedom to experiment now you're no longer limited by your own music collection.

Even today, it's that differentiating factor that provides the key appeal of *Monster Rancher*. "I hope players can enjoy seeing which monsters they can obtain from various different songs they have fond memories of, or even songs they've been really interested in lately," says Fujita. If that sounds like fun to you, *Monster Rancher 1 & 2 DX* is already available digitally so you can jump right into the action.

» [Switch] Exploring locations like the Barees Amusement Park can help you to further develop your monster.

» [Switch] The CD selection is certainly vast, though it's not comprehensive – but maybe we listen to obscure bands.

» [Switch] There are plenty of statistics to dive into, though as always, some key information is hidden from the player.

CURIOUS CREATURES

A look at some of the monsters that you can rear in the two Monster Rancher games

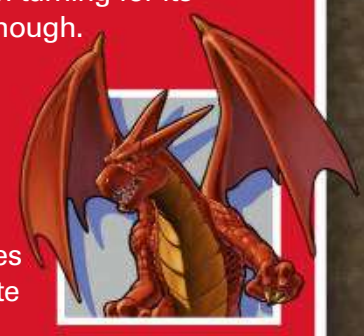
SUEZO

■ This unusual looking beast is arguably the most recognisable of the monsters in the series, and they're pretty easy to get hold of in both the first and second game. They're quite intelligent, but they usually don't have brilliant life stats.

PIXIE

■ The first *Monster Rancher* describes the Pixie as "a popular one who's selfish and hard to breed", and you'll likely find it challenging to raise due to its tendency towards disobedience. It's worth taming for its powerful fire attacks, though.

DRAGON



■ These mythical beasts live up to their reputation in both *Monster Rancher* games – you can't just generate them from a CD, you'll need to win Dragon Tusk Tourney events instead. They're very powerful fighters but they don't live too long.

DUCKEN

■ This monster is part duck, part toy and has a peculiar segmented body. First introduced in *Monster Rancher 2*, this is another monster obtained via in game actions. You'll need to obtain a duck doll and use it while combining monsters.

MOCCHI

■ As one of the cuter monsters introduced in *Monster Rancher 2*, as well as a key character in the *Monster Rancher* anime series, Mocchi has become one of the most popular creatures in the series. It's named after the Japanese food mochi.

THE MAKING OF

THE SIMPSONS™ HIT & RUN

» [GameCube] Cars can be used as platforms for certain collectibles, like in the town's trailer park.

Episode 4F18: In Marge We Trust
The mascot for a popular Japanese cleaning product, that just happens to bear an uncanny resemblance to Homer J. Simpson.
Get out of my way, all of you! Th
SPARKLE BOX
B Back

» [GameCube] Collectible cards reference classic moments from the show like Mr Sparkle, Homer's detergent mascot doppelganger.

RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT'S OPEN-WORLD GAME PRESENTED AN ENTIRE GENERATION OF SIMPSONS FANS WITH A HILARIOUS, FAMILIAR WORLD FULL OF MEMORABLE CHARACTERS AND BIZARRE VEHICLES. ALMOST TWENTY YEARS LATER, WE CATCH UP WITH ITS CREATORS TO FIND OUT HOW IT CAME TO BE

WORD BY NIALL O'DONOGHUE

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT
- **RELEASED:** 2003
- **PLATFORM:** GAMECUBE, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** OPEN-WORLD ACTION GAME

For anyone who grew up enthralled by the early seasons of *The Simpsons*, *Hit & Run* is something of a nostalgia lodestone. Driving around its bright, pastel-coloured world, you're encountered with one joke after the next from the 'classic' era of Matt Groening's animated sitcom, whether through finding the Flanders family's bomb shelter, trying your luck on the Love Tester, or simply picking up the most ridiculous vehicle you can find and going on a rampage. With a structure openly inspired by then-contemporary classic *Grand Theft Auto III*, developer Radical Entertainment managed to build off the back of the *Crazy Taxi*-inspired predecessor *The Simpsons: Road Rage*, creating an experience renowned to this day for its humour and engaging gameplay.

Designer Christopher Mitchell, now head of the school of creative technologies at Vancouver Film School, landed a job at Radical after transitioning into game development from teaching, first working on the action game *James Cameron's Dark Angel*. "I was still very much learning the craft at that point, and didn't entirely know what I was doing," he smiles. "*Dark Angel* suffered through me and then, luckily, Radical liked me enough to put me onto *The Simpsons*." He credits the success of *Road Rage* with restoring the confidence of publishers Fox Interactive in what had proven to be a "challenging licence", perhaps most infamously represented by *The Simpsons: Wrestling*.

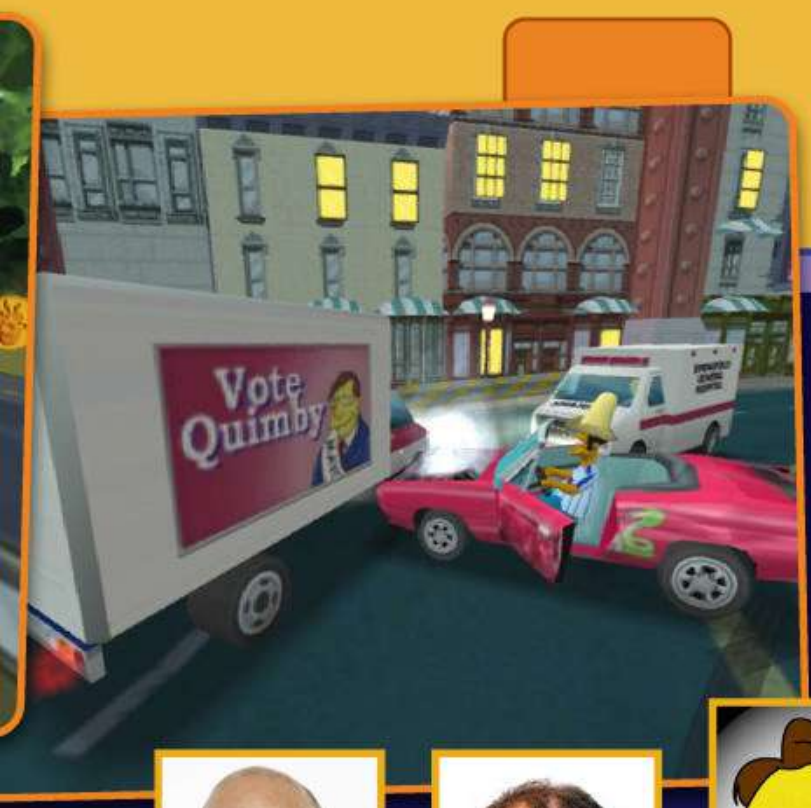
"Up until that point, the problem with *Simpsons* games was that sometimes people think the brand will carry the day," former EVP of product development for Fox Interactive Michael Pole told Input last November. "That started to change when the internet became a bigger part of our lives. If a game sucked, you didn't have to wait a month to find out from a magazine, you knew within days. Gradually, the industry began to realise this." At first, publishers wanted "just wanted another

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CRASH TAG TEAM RACING (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: GAMECUBE, PLAYSTATION 2, PSP, XBOX
YEAR: 2005

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2, WII, WINDOWS, XBOX
YEAR: 2006

PROTOTYPE
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 3, WINDOWS, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2009



» Steve Bocska is president of Pug Interactive.

» Nigel Brooke is founder of Steamclock Software.

» Christopher Mitchell is head of the school of creative technologies at Vancouver Film School.

"I WAS STILL VERY MUCH LEARNING THE CRAFT AT THAT POINT, AND DIDN'T ENTIRELY KNOW WHAT I WAS DOING"
CHRISTOPHER MITCHELL

driving game" from Radical, according to *Simpsons* co-showrunner Matt Selman, who worked on story and dialogue for *Hit & Run*. "We were like, everyone's playing whatever version of *Grand Theft Auto*, people need to get out of the cars," he said in a recent IGN interview. "That was a huge creative battle over whether it was just a 'driving around doing missions' game or a 'getting out of the car and doing missions' game".

By the time Christopher joined preproduction on *Hit & Run*, the project's nucleus was established: an open-world game blending driving with 'out-of-car' gameplay "*GTA* as a structure wasn't that much of an impact on our design decisions from day-to-day, but it's absolutely true that if there was no *GTA III*, there wouldn't have been a *Simpsons: Hit & Run*," Christopher says. Rather than trying to mimic Liberty City, the goal of *Hit & Run* was to deliver on the fantasy of a Springfield that could be fully explored, associate producer on *Hit & Run* and president of Pug Interactive Steve Bocska tells us. "That wasn't the case in *Road Rage*," he elaborates. "It's a racing game with objectives in it, and yes, you were passing by things in the environment that were very 'Springfield', but you really didn't get an opportunity to stop and explore."

At the start of development, Radical focused on recreating locations from the show like Evergreen Terrace, the suburban home of the Simpsons. In the finished game, the area is a compact loop interwoven with various shortcuts and false turns. However, earlier versions closed off this loop to differentiate it from others in the game, and focus testers soon complained that it felt too small. "The world was the same size, but the fact that they couldn't do it as a loop was making them realise what a small world it really was," Christopher says. "We learned some funny design lessons that way, about what the flow of a good open-world game was." The team also shifted their mindset away from simply replicating areas to an approach prioritising the racecourse-like tracks encircling levels. Christopher credits designer Sheik Sahib with initially laying out roads, which were then populated with mission content and art, and later iterated upon as future levels set higher-quality benchmarks. "That took a while to learn as a team, that when you're making even an open-world driving game, then still make the track first," Christopher says.

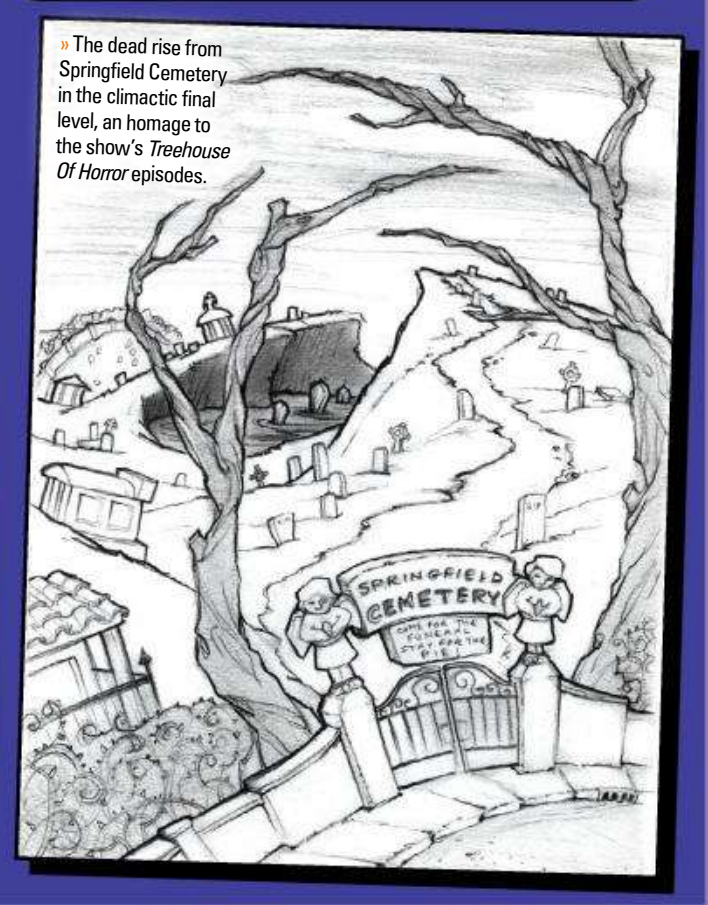
The story has the madcap feel of the show's *Treehouse Of Horror* Halloween specials, with robotic wasps, covert black vehicles and an unusual new brand of Buzz Cola setting the stage for a narrative spanning across various areas of Springfield, with the Simpsons family and Apu as playable characters. Christopher explains that while the genesis of the game's mission structure and narrative were present during preproduction, both changed dramatically during development. "The story was heavily influenced by the missions that we were doing, because sometimes we would

» [GameCube] You can buy cars from NPCs like ol' Gil, the perpetually down-on-his-luck salesman located near the nuclear power plant.

D'OH!

EXAMINING THE CANCELLED UNREAL REMASTER PROJECT

With no current way to access *Hit & Run* on modern platforms, developer Reuben 'Reubs' Ward took it upon himself to recreate the opening level in Unreal Engine in just one week, documenting the process on his YouTube channel. Reuben used a fan-made 3D editor to import the map into Unreal, before using a mixture of AI texture upscaling and Photoshop animations to drastically enhance the game's graphical fidelity. Unreal's advanced locomotion system was used to get Homer up and running, complete with rudimentary lip-syncing and a first-person camera. Meanwhile, a modified buggy rig from an Unreal practice project served as the basis to recreate the family's iconic pink Sedan, with driving controls inspired by recent *Grand Theft Auto* titles, complimented by a rudimentary AI driving system for NPCs. All of which resulted in a surprisingly robust recreation of the game's opening level The Cola Caper, complete with sound effects, music and Easter eggs. The demo was originally made available for subscribers to Reuben's Patreon page, but was subsequently removed, with Reuben telling Eurogamer that the removal was a preventative measure due to "copyright concerns", rather than a response to a takedown request. And while *The Simpsons* co-showrunner Matt Selman voiced support for a remaster, he admitted that, "It's a complicated corporate octopus to try to make that happen". It seems fans will have to wait a while longer to revisit Radical's interpretation of Springfield, but never say never: the game's 20th anniversary is coming up in November 2023, after all.



» The dead rise from Springfield Cemetery in the climactic final level, an homage to the show's *Treehouse Of Horror* episodes.

VEHICULAR CARNAGE

THE BEST CARS OL' GIL HAS TO OFFER

FAMILY SEDAN

You can't go wrong with the classics. Torn straight out of the intro to the show itself, there's something instantly nostalgic about jumping into this car and driving around Evergreen Terrace. What it lacks in speed, it makes up for with smooth handling – perfect for a tutorial level.

FIRE TRUCK

Sometimes, you need to go big or go home. Despite its painfully slow acceleration, this fire truck can pick up lethal levels of speed, making it a veritable wrecking ball on wheels if left to its own devices. Not the most practical for races, then, but a fun option nonetheless.

HONOR ROLLER

Taken from the season three episode *Saturdays Of Thunder*, this souped-up derby car originally belonged to Martin Prince Jr, before an unfortunate racing accident landed it in Bart's possession instead. With butter-smooth handling, this car is a pleasure to cruise through Springfield's downtown area, setting up some impressive stunt jumps.

PICKUP TRUCK

Don't be fooled by the boxes rattling around in the back, or the mysterious feathers pouring out of the boot. Cletus' ride is used for multiple missions, pairing you up with the loveable redneck riding shotgun. Delivering bizarre streams of consciousness as you go, these journeys act as a throwback to the ride-sharing days of *The Simpsons: Road Rage*.

MR PLOW

This truck hails from the legendary season four episode *Mr Plow*, which sees Homer starting a snow ploughing business with an irresistible sales pitch, "Are you tired of having your hands cut off by snow-blowers, and the inevitable heart attacks that come with shovelling snow?" You can't argue with that.

PLOW KING

The other half of the snow ploughing equation, Barney's truck is remarkably durable, swatting aside practically every other vehicle in the game with ease. Boasting its own jingle, a country music tune courtesy of Linda Ronstadt, it provides serious competition for Mr Plow and is great for destruction missions.

DUFF TRUCK

We'd be remiss not to plug the drink so beloved by Homer, with this bright red truck letting you fly the flag for Springfield's favourite beer wherever you go. While it's far from the most efficient vehicle, at least you can blast Yello's techno track *Oh Yeah* and briefly imagine yourself as Duffman.

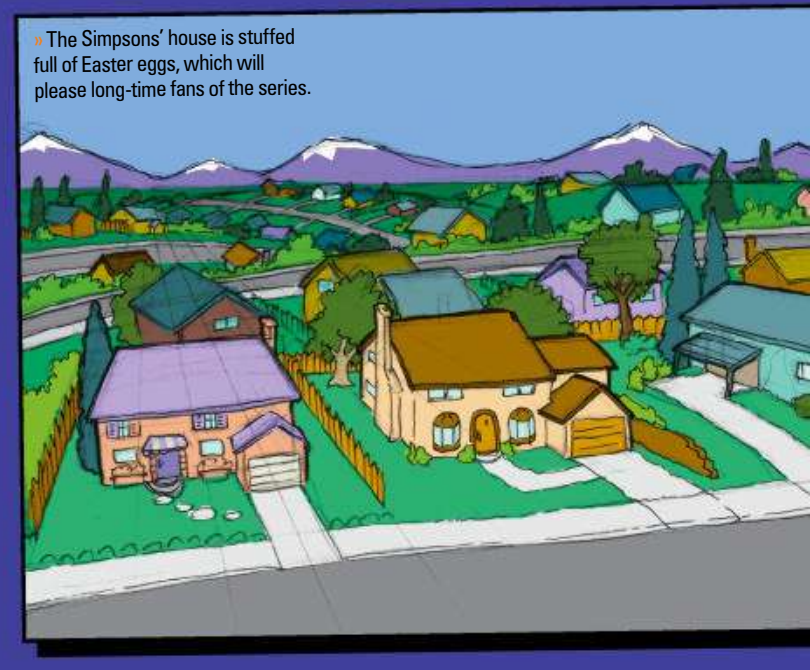
ROCKET CAR

This streamlined, non-collectible car is built for one purpose, and one purpose only: speed. Merely grazing off a lamppost can spell your doom, but if you find a quiet stretch of road and let it rip, you're in for the ride of your life. For about five seconds, anyways.

▶ just discover [that] something's fun, so the story would have to change to accommodate those decisions," he explains.

These often took the form of a joke dreamt up by one of Radical's developers, which was then taken completely seriously and added into the game. When racing was implemented to fill out Springfield with optional activities, for example, Christopher saw the perfect setup for a punchline: have Ralph Wiggum do the countdown, and get the numbers wrong every time. However, for the gag to work properly, the numbers displayed on-screen needed to be changed to represent Ralph's derailed train of thought. "Luckily, the UI programmer and then the UI artist really bought into that idea," Christopher recalls. "So they architected this little system where I could simply script different UI elements to reflect what Ralph Wiggum was [saying]. That kind of stuff, where somebody has a funny idea and then it gets backed up by the rest of the team, was really common – I think that's part of why the game wound up being as funny as it was, because it was just really easy to shove little bits of humour in."

Missions in *Hit & Run* are often multi-stage affairs, asking you to complete fetch quests, races and tailing missions against the clock, often while being chased by one of Springfield's less reputable denizens. Designers worked alongside programmers to script a mission's structure, using animation and sound event libraries to bring them to life. Missions like Better Than Beef task you with accompanying Cletus around Springfield's Downtown to collect roadkill, before delivering the goods to the Krusty Burger and escaping from an enraged Apu yelling, "No one can sell rotten meat in this town but me." Designers would pass these missions around each other, receiving feedback and preventing anybody from getting overly attached to any particular ideas. "A lot of nights, we'd order food in because we were staying late, and then some of us would watch *Family Guy* or *Mr Show* – sometimes we'd watch *Simpsons* episodes too – but it was a weird bonding exercise, the way that we just



» The Simpsons' house is stuffed full of Easter eggs, which will please long-time fans of the series.

» [GameCube] You can steal cars from other drivers, a quick screen wipe glossing over the messy realities of carjacking.

» [GameCube] The police start chasing you once you've filled up the meter around your minimap with acts of wanton destruction.

» [GameCube] Jumping over the Springfield tyre fire is a risky affair: suffice to say this attempt didn't end well.

» [GameCube] You can keep driving your car after it's exploded, although it's not exactly the quickest transport method out there.

» [GameCube] The world is populated with various wacky billboards, with an art style hewing closer to the animated show.

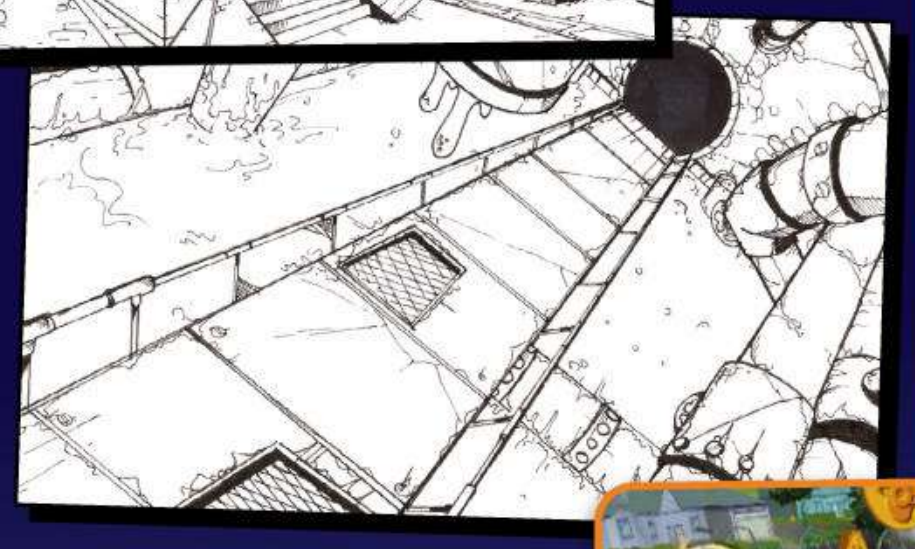
watched funny things and ate our dinner, and then go work on the game again for a while," Christopher says. "For the most part, it was a young team, so it was possible to stay and do mad hours on it. Which I don't recommend, but at the time it made sense. We made a funny game because we were a funny team."

When Chris entered the project, he took over writing tasks for various missions, although he repeatedly emphasises that many of his ideas were inspired by other developers. "A lot of other people's jokes wound up inside the script," he says. "Maybe they said something that caused me to have a funny idea later. I did a lot of the writing, but the other designers absolutely had a big impact on that too." These scripts were then sent over to *The Simpsons* show writers for review and touch-up work: a particularly exciting experience for *Simpsons* mega-fan Christopher. He recalls dialogue written between Homer and Mr Burns, which was completely changed to parody *A Christmas Carol*. "It was so good, and that kind of stuff happened a lot, where we would have mission dialogue and the structure written and then it would go off to Fox-land and then come back much funnier than it used to be," Christopher says. "I'm really happy that a lot of my jokes stayed, but there's a lot of solid gold that got added to the script by *The Simpsons* writers too."

Art and sound went through a similar approval process, with discussions between Fox and Radical ramping up toward the end of development. "There was a lot of back and forth and I think that you have to be open to that and have to respect it," Steve says. "Sometimes you have to bite your tongue and thicken your skin, and it just makes you better when you realise that other people have built careers around being good dialogue writers for animated series, and being good 2D artists. They know what the characters are supposed to look like, they know when something looks wrong – even if they've never seen it before in 3D."

Hit & Run was developed using Radical's in-house engine, created by members of its shared technology team. "*Road Rage* was part of our first group of games on that era of consoles, so we were still figuring out a lot of stuff: it was definitely one of those 'building the plane as we're flying it' sort of things," laughs Nigel Brooke, Steamclock Software founder and lead

"IF THERE WAS NO GTA III, THERE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN A SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN"
CHRISTOPHER MITCHELL



» The Stonecutters' tunnel can be accessed in the first level, paying respect to the classic season six episode *Homer The Great*.

» [GameCube] There's no way to fight human NPCs in the game, but that doesn't mean you can't wreak a little havoc.

» [GameCube] These robotic bees are one of the few enemies in the game, firing bolts of electricity.

» [GameCube] There's no need to race honourably: the game actively encourages you to attempt to ram opponents off the road.

» [GameCube] Platforming sections are mixed in with driving gameplay, often challenging you with scaling iconic structures from the show.

THE GRAND TOUR

EXPLORING THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF SPRINGFIELD

MOE'S TAVERN

This watering hole has served many functions throughout the show's history, from a brief foray into the restaurant business with Uncle Moe's Family Feedbag, to acting as a speakeasy pushing Homer's bootleg liquor during prohibition. Here, you can see boxes of Panda Chow in the background, evidence of Moe Szyslak's animal-smuggling side-business.

THE SIMPSONS HOUSE

While you can't explore the entirety of the Simpsons' house, what's on display is lovingly recreated. Inside, you can see baby Maggie swinging from the kitchen lights, while outside you can interact with the huge tiki mask featured in the season 11 episode *Days Of Wine And D'oh'ses*.

SPRINGFIELD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Even though there's little to explore here, it's undeniably a thrill to step into the school so prominently featured in the show. And make sure you keep an eye out for background gags: our favourite is Groundskeeper Willie thwacking himself in the face with a rake, à la Sideshow Bob.

NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

The sight of Homer's workstation instantly evokes countless fond memories, like his unwilling rivalry with Frank Grimes in the season eight classic *Homer's Enemy*. Ever the diligent employee, disabling the cameras in your power-plant workstation lets Homer kick back for a nap, at the expense of this poor sod in the background.

programmer on *Hit & Run*. "When we finished the cycle on *Road Rage* and other games in that era, we went back and went, 'OK, now we understand how this works, we have to approach things right.'" While the map of *Road Rage* was small enough to be fully-rendered, the scale of *Hit & Run* required Springfield to be broken up into manually defined cells, loaded in-and-out of memory as required.

> "THE AI IN THERE WOULD JUST GET COMPLETELY STUCK, IT'D JUST BE RUNNING INTO THE WALLS ALL THE TIME AND IT WAS SLOWING IT DOWN"
> **NIGEL BROOKE**

Nigel joined the *Hit & Run* team in its final year of development, primarily focusing on polishing the game's systems and reducing memory usage. However, one major problem remained for him to tackle head-on: driving AI. At the time, NPCs had trouble navigating tight, windy areas of the world, limiting how quickly designers could tune their speed and stunting the challenge of races in certain areas, like the waterfront. "The AI in there would just get completely stuck, it'd just be running into the walls all the time and it was slowing it down," Nigel says. To fix this, Nigel implemented a method allowing NPC drivers to analyse the road ahead and navigate sharp corners, detecting changes in level geometry and using the handbrake to power-slide around them. "That was the thing that basically got us to the point where the AI could navigate the really tight, windy areas," Nigel concludes.

Steve joined similarly later in the development, making sure this gargantuan project nailed the dismount. "There was a lot of polish that was needed: still some tough decisions, but mostly just around making sure that the experience was of a high enough level of quality." This required a thoughtful approach to play testing, where players committed for multiple full days playing through the full game, fuelled by Radical-provided pizza. "The data [and feedback] that we got was very poignant, very spot-on," he says. "We were able to really quickly tune it." Where this shines brightest is in the vehicles themselves, each of which feels appreciably unique and enjoyable to get to grips with. "That's arduous work, absolutely painstaking work, where you're playing with variables that are like 'this affects this, but it also sort of affects this' – very much by feel," Christopher says. "That all just takes time. There is no way to get a good result outside of just lots of investment."

What comes across incredibly strongly, almost 20 years later, is the sense of passion for the show itself poured into *Hit & Run*. Every interior has multiple jokes directly referencing everything from the *Mr Plow* episode to Homer's entry into the Stonecutters. Designers like Christopher worked closely with the art team to create many of these moments, like displaying new titles on the theatre marquee every time the player drives past. "There was a lot of effort put on those, all with that funny production layer: what can we do that we actually have time for?" Christopher says, noting that gags like Frostillicus – the frozen figure of Jasper propped up for display in the Kwik-E-Mart fridge – could be created using pre-existing assets. Moments like this also served as band-aids to hide the world's limitations: players will always try to open doors, for example, so having a character bark out a one-liner through an intercom helped to logically explain these barriers. "People are trying to find the boundaries of the world, and we don't want them to just hit a static wall and that's the end of it," Christopher adds. "We want their head to excuse the shortcomings of the world. It's something I've discovered as a designer: people want to forgive you, as long as you give them an excuse." *Hit & Run* was received positively after releasing in 2003, and was a commercial success, going on to sell over three million copies. Despite what they've achieved in the years since, all interviewees have stories about meeting younger colleagues most excited about their involvement with the game, and sharing how it impacted their childhood. Unanimously, they look back on the experience fondly. "The team was so strong that, arguably, I'm still on that team," Christopher says, noting the connections to other Vivendi developers he maintains to this day. "It's crazy." Steve feels similarly. "There was never a map of Springfield anywhere," he says. "So even getting all of the different regions on that map, and getting everything to feel like different neighbourhoods or areas, and to somehow have it make sense, and then to connect them together with roads: it was building a world, I guess."

And what a world it is. If you ever find yourself nostalgic for the glory days of *The Simpsons*, in interactive form or otherwise, you can do little better than boot up *Hit & Run* and spend a few hours driving around Evergreen Terrace, basking in the glow of a warm afternoon's sun.

» [GameCube] Moe's Tavern offers various distractions for its underage patrons, like a slot machine and the Love Tester.

BURNS MANOR

While you can't explore the interior of Burns Manor, home to Springfield's miserly nuclear energy baron, careful exploration can lead you to its exterior. Here, you can mess around with a human chess board, a surprisingly detailed recreation of a 15-second throwaway joke in the original show.

KWIK-E-MART

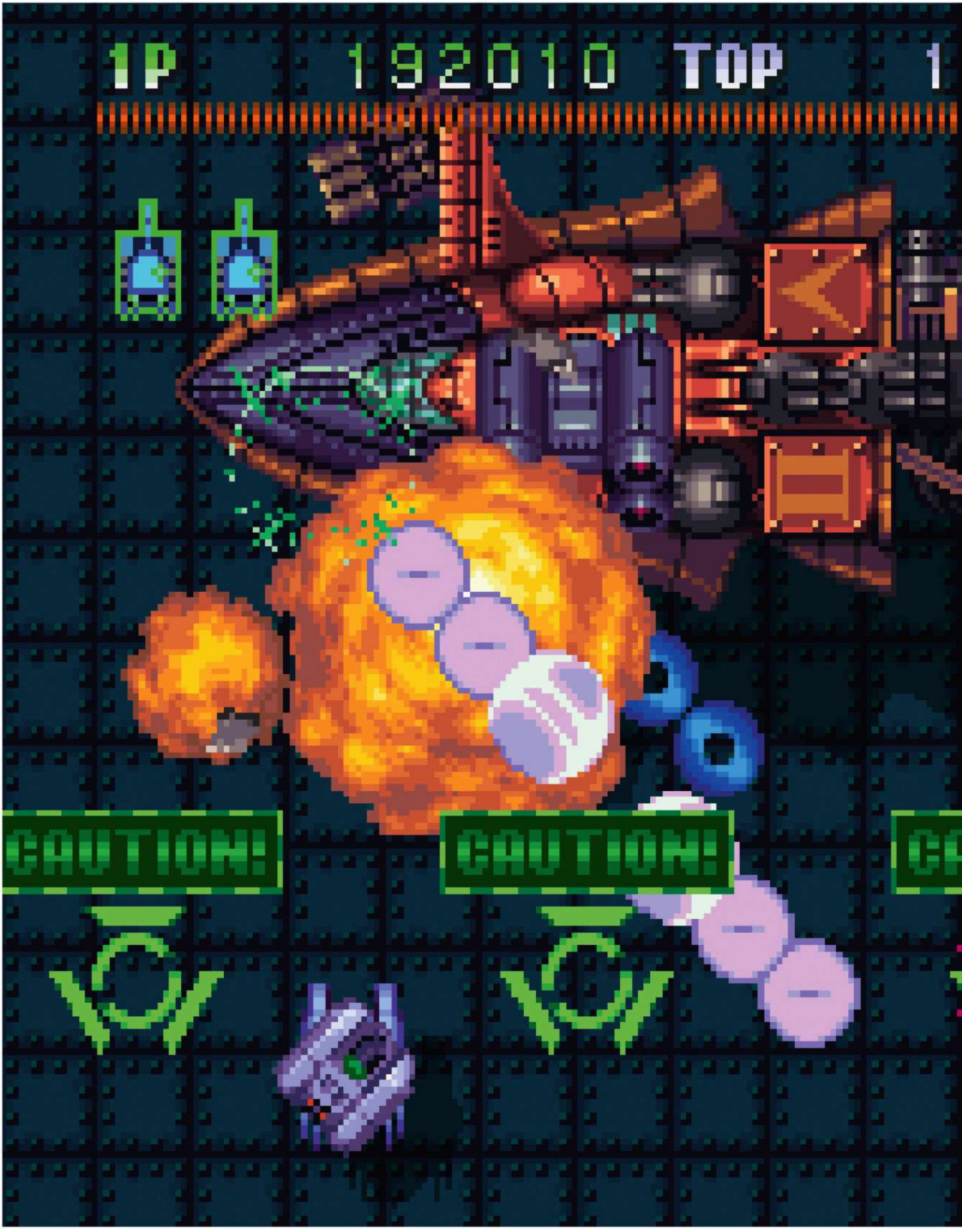
Apu's store is stuffed full of jokes, with characters like Krusty The Clown popping in for brief cameos. While the food on offer might be somewhat questionable, there's no better way to experience the world of Springfield than drinking a Squishee or chowing down on a tofu hot dog.

JEBEDIAH SPRINGFIELD STATUE

It's worth stopping by the statue of the town's founder Jebediah Springfield, proudly displayed in the town square. The Simpsons family has a lot of history with this Jebediah: Lisa unearthed his ignoble past as a murderous pirate, while Bart cut off the statue's head in the very first season.

DOWNTOWN

Visiting Springfield's Downtown is a treat for fans, as it's populated with fan-favourite characters like Professor Frink, Dr Nick Riviera and Snake. There's plenty of sightseeing spots to take in, but for our money you should try climbing to the top of the Lard Lad statue, or hunt down the Monorail Car.


1P 192010 TOP 1
CAUTION!
CAUTION!

Guardian Force

REGRET RECTIFIED

» SATURN » 1998 » SUCCESS

When I got into bird photography some eight years ago, I was looking for a way to fund my first expensive lens. It wasn't cheap at £856 and I didn't like the idea of taking out a loan or something similar. I eventually decided on selling off several of my Saturn shooters, including *Cotton 2*, *Kyukyoku Tiger II*, *Guardian Force* and an Irem compilation featuring *X-Multiply* and *Image Fight*, with the reasoning that I could buy them back at a later date.

Many of those games have now tripled or quadrupled in price and as a result I'll probably never own a physical version of *X-Multiply* again (it now sells for close to £250). I did make sure that *Guardian Force* was the first game I secured after deciding to take a good hard look at my collection earlier this year (you can read about it in issue 231).

The reason why I grabbed *Guardian Force* is because there's nothing quite like it on the Saturn and the Switch version isn't much cop due to a hobbled framerate (which still isn't perfect post-patch). Created by Success, it's a rather barren port of the studio's arcade game with no extra bells and whistles that you'd typically find on a Saturn conversion. Despite the bareness of it, *Guardian Force* remains cracking fun, simply because there's no other shmup on Sega's system that plays anything like it.

Mechanically it's pretty solid thanks to your tank's ability to pick up different weapons, including a devastating laser and a weird yo-yo-type power-up, which can be levelled-up RPG-style by grabbing pink crystals from downed enemies. You can also rotate your tank's main turret through 360-degrees (your base cannon fires in whatever direction the screen is scrolling), which means you'll often be firing in a different direction to where you're moving.

Success' game takes full advantage of your tanks manoeuvrability, constantly pressing you with ever more outrageous boss and enemy patterns which require you to use the entire screen in order to stay alive. Throw in an interesting scoring system based around nabbing dropped badges from defeated enemies and mid-bosses that need to be defeated before a timer counts down in order to extract maximum points, and you end up with a hectic shooter that feels quite unlike its many peers. It cost £120 to add it back into my collection (three times what I sold it for) and I won't be selling it again. Regret rectified.

>> This month we offer the definitive verdict on The A500 Mini, test some new GameCube cables, play through a new Evercade cart and see how Tempest 2000 fares on an OLED screen

» The keyboard on The A500 Mini isn't functional, so you'll need to use the virtual one that's included for some games.

The A500 Mini

AMIGA MEANS FRIEND, AND THIS IS ONE FRIENDLY AMIGA

INFORMATION

» **RELEASED:** 8 APRIL 2022

» **PRICE:** £119.99

» **PUBLISHER:** RETRO GAMES LTD

When Retro Games Ltd introduced its miniature version of the Commodore 64 back in 2018, it managed to nail most of the fundamentals while leaving some room for improvement. We were pleased to see that feedback was taken on board for the full-size version of the system later on, so when The A500 Mini was announced, that experience left us confident that the result would be a solid system. Thankfully, our confidence was well-placed – The A500 Mini is one of the best mini consoles we've seen so far.

It all starts with exterior authenticity. The miniature machine is a faithful recreation of the most popular Amiga model, with only the back of the machine needing to be reconfigured to accommodate the necessary connectors – three USB ports, USB-C power and HDMI video. The HDMI cable and USB-C cables are included, but as is becoming increasingly common, a power adapter isn't. The system also includes a two-button mouse with the classic design. This uses an optical sensor rather than a trackball, but that's one concession to modernity that we'll happily tolerate.

More contentious will be the inclusion of a control pad instead of a joystick. The team behind The A500 Mini rightly points out that while no Amiga system ever shipped with a default joystick, one did come with a pad. However, this favours strict authenticity over authenticity to people's lived experiences, and when those two ideals clash we find people tend to prefer the latter. Fortunately, the very nice joystick made for The C64 works here. Having said all of that, there's nothing wrong with the pad itself. Although it looks like

»[A500 Mini] Some games, like *Kick Off 2*, zoom in better than others – it all depends on the original resolution.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Retro Games Ltd is a producer of retro gaming hardware that first introduced The C64 Mini in 2018, following a successful crowdfunding campaign. The company later followed up with The C64, a full-size version of the machine with a working keyboard and improved joystick design, and a special VIC-20 edition of the system. The A500 Mini was announced in August 2021 and is a logical next step for the company, building upon its relationship with the Commodore IP owner Cloanto and a variety of games rights holders. The system also celebrates the 35th anniversary of the Amiga 500 model.

PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Renovation Products Collection 1

This is a great collection of varied games that would cost a fortune to own on original hardware. More of this please Blaze, it's your best release so far.

NICK

Gunborg: Dark Matters

This one's been tricky to play due to the dual-analogue controls, but the action has made it worth the challenge.

»[A500 Mini] *The Chaos Engine* would be one of our first picks when ranking Amiga classics, so it's good to see here.

» Here's the pad that comes with The A500 Mini, does it remind you of anything?

the notoriously dodgy Amiga CD32 controller at first glance, it is a new design that uses a more modern and comfortable d-pad and button layout.

The trickiest part of a mini console is usually getting the games right, and The A500 Mini does a good job of capturing the Amiga experience with its selection of 25 games. Out of the box you'll have access to favourites such as *Speedball 2*, *Worms: The Director's Cut*, *Alien Breed*, *Zool*, *Another World*, *Stunt Car Racer* and *Pinball Dreams*. There's enough variety that everyone should be able to find a favourite within the bunch, and the inclusion of AGA games like *Alien Breed 3D* is a nice touch. The big surprise is the lack of Sensible Software games, which are available on Evercade, Antstream and Piepacker. Still, this doesn't matter too much for reasons we'll soon discuss.

Where The A500 Mini really earns its keep is in its ease of use. The menu system is user-friendly and you never have to mess around with virtual floppy disks or advanced settings. That extends to the ability to add games via WHDLoad packages – as long as you're sure to get full game packages and not just the wrappers, they just work. Retro Games Ltd naturally stresses that these should be legally obtained, but essentially if you want a game and can obtain it, there's nothing stopping you running it on this system. That goes for the AGA games too, if you're an Amiga 1200 fan.

The A500 Mini also performs well, and we didn't notice any problems with any of the games we ran. The use of a virtual keyboard because of the lack of a physical one isn't ideal, but the included games have been well chosen to minimise its usage. Video output is 720p, and you get a good little selection of graphical options – three levels of zoom, the usual blur filter and a CRT-style mode with blurring and scanlines. One issue we did notice was that with the default sharp-scaling option, certain games exhibit some serious pixel shimmering at the highest level of zoom. If you're sensitive to that, we'd suggest using a lower zoom level or turning the filter on.

One thing you will have noticed is that we have referred to The A500 Mini as a mini console, and there's a good reason for that. Although this device runs classic computer games, it is fully focused on providing an easy to use gaming experience and makes no pretence of being a computer. You're not going to be messing around in Workbench, and advanced settings are largely off the table. Just like any other mini console out there, The A500 Mini is not aimed towards power users who demand total control over their experience.

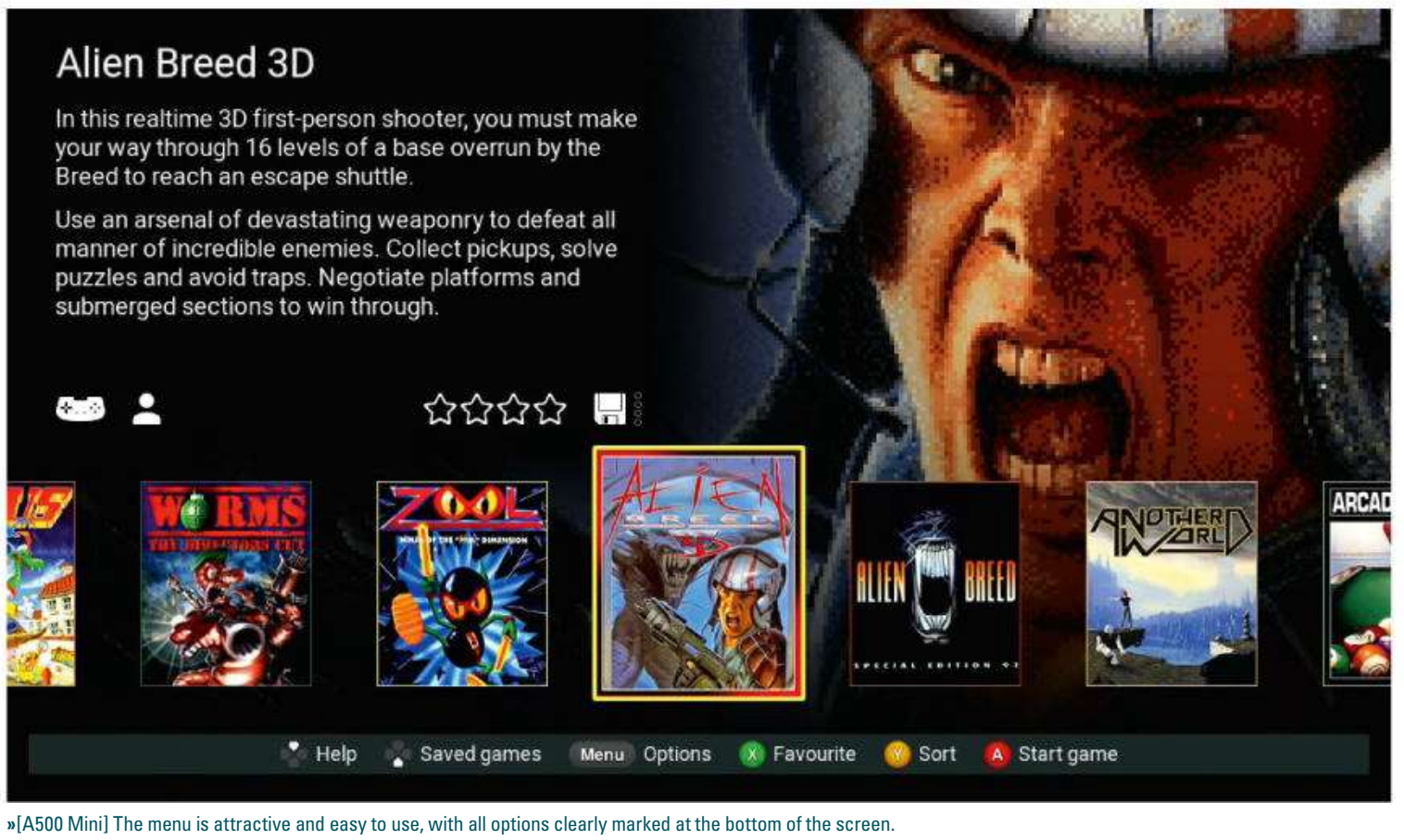
For most players though, The A500 Mini should be an appealing prospect. Actually getting an Amiga working these days is a bit of a faff, and emulation can be tricky too. The A500 Mini gives you access to a classic computer library with console-style ease of use, and while it isn't quite perfect, joysticks are available and the game library can easily be tailored to your liking, leaving few substantial complaints. What's left is a product that offers just about everything you need to enjoy Amiga games in a single box, and that has to be a good thing. ✱

In a nutshell

If you've ever wanted to get into Amiga games but found the system daunting, or just want a quick and easy way to revisit your old favourites, The A500 Mini does the job admirably. Just don't expect it to be a full computer, because it isn't.

»[A500 Mini] Support for AGA games means that you can play games like *Alien Breed 3D*.

»[A500 Mini] Here's the CRT filter. It's not amazing, but it's OK compared to other mini consoles.


Alien Breed 3D
In this realtime 3D first-person shooter, you must make your way through 16 levels of a base overrun by the Breed to reach an escape shuttle.
Use an arsenal of devastating weaponry to defeat all manner of incredible enemies. Collect pickups, solve puzzles and avoid traps. Negotiate platforms and submerged sections to win through.
WORMS
ZOOL
ALIEN BREED
ANOTHER WORLD
Help
Saved games
Menu
Options
X
Favourite
Y
Sort
A
Start game

»[A500 Mini] The menu is attractive and easy to use, with all options clearly marked at the bottom of the screen.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Retro-Bit Prism HDMI Adapter & Component Cable

» **System:** GameCube » **Buy it from:** Amazon, castlemaniagames.com » **Buy it for:** £69.99 (HDMI) / £59.99 (Component)

The GameCube has fantastic video output via component, but the official cable is now extremely expensive, so Retro-Bit has introduced the Prism accessories as alternatives. You'll need a DOL-001 GameCube with the digital-video output port to use either. Both options are an upgrade over standard composite cables, but you'll want to run games in progressive scan mode to get the best results. PAL games don't support this by default, so you'll need either NTSC games or a way to force progressive output on your PAL games, such as the homebrew program Swiss.

For many players, the HDMI adapter will probably be the preferred option. It's based on the tried and true GCVideo project, as used in similar products such as the GCHD and the Carby, and allows for excellent video output up to 480p/576p. A USB-C port allows for easy firmware upgrades, and there's a remote control included in order to operate the menu. This offers options such as scanline settings. 480i/576i signals are handled with a line doubler that has a slight flickering effect but doesn't add lag. If you're not worried about lag, you can turn this off and let your TV handle deinterlacing instead.

The component cable is a lot simpler – great image quality once again, but with no firmware or fancy extras like scanline options. This is therefore best suited to players who are running TVs that don't have HDMI, or those who have invested in external scaling devices. When we paired it with a RetroTink-5X Pro, we were able to achieve similar image sharpness to the HDMI adapter, and gained the benefits of advanced scaling, deinterlacing and scanline options.

Both accessories are competitively priced, so the only thing we can really complain about is the bulky connectors they both have. These protrude a fair way from the system and can be seen to sag a little, so we're a little worried about stress on the port and connector – if you can prop something under them to support them, that's probably a good idea.

»The component cable is ideal for use with external scalers like the OSSC and RetroTink.

»The HD Adapter doesn't come with its own HDMI cable, but it will work with any that you happen to have handy.

Evercade: Renovation Products Collection 1

» **System:** Evercade, Evercade VS
» **Buy it for:** £17.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

This cart is an absolute banger, trouncing *Gremlin Collection 1* in the quality stakes and continuing with obscure, pricier games that we first saw with Blaze's *Gaelco Arcade 1* collection. Granted, some games are a little weak (*Sol-Deace* and *Beast Wrestler*) but the rest are great fun and include shooters (*Granada*, *Gaiares* and *Final Zone*) action games (*Valis*, *El Viento, Dino Land* and *Valis III*) and RPGs (*Arcus Odyssey*, *Exile* and *Traysia*). Many of these games were originally exclusive to Japan (they've all been handily translated) and several are very expensive to currently own, meaning this is an excellent way to discover them. If you fancy a walk on the wild side you'll discover our favourite Evercade cart yet.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **91%**

Tempest 4000

» **System:** Switch (tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PC » **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £16

Four years after it hit the PS4, Llamasoft's spiritual successor to *TxK* arrives on the Switch and it's absolutely been worth the wait. Llamasoft's superb tube shooter feels as fresh as ever and looks absolutely spectacular on an OLED Switch with its vivid colours and chaotic swirls of enemies threatening to overload your eyes. Three game modes are on offer: Survival, Classic and Pure, there are online leaderboards to conquer and all the usual power-ups are all present and correct, as are the challenging level designs. Its audio overload and simplistic menus and control layouts won't be for everyone (the bonus stage's controls really need an inverse option) but if you're after a pure arena shooter, you won't find anything finer on the system.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **93%**

Gunborg: Dark Matters

» **System:** Switch (tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PC » **Buy it for:** £13.49
» **Buy it from:** Online, redartgames.com

It's entirely possible to bounce off of *Gunborg* at first, as its style of twin-stick platforming almost feels like too much to manage – as well as jumping between platforms, you've got to deal with plenty of enemies. However, once you learn how to take advantage of the controls, the game really clicks. It never gets easy though, as this is a challenging platformer that will test even veterans of the genre. The synth-heavy soundtrack is the highlight of the presentation, as the graphics are fine but unspectacular. *Gunborg* isn't a long game but there are plenty of optional extras to collect should you wish to, so players willing to return for those and new high scores will get the most from it.

NICK THORPE

>> Score **78%**

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO ROLE-PLAYING VIDEOGAMES IS HERE

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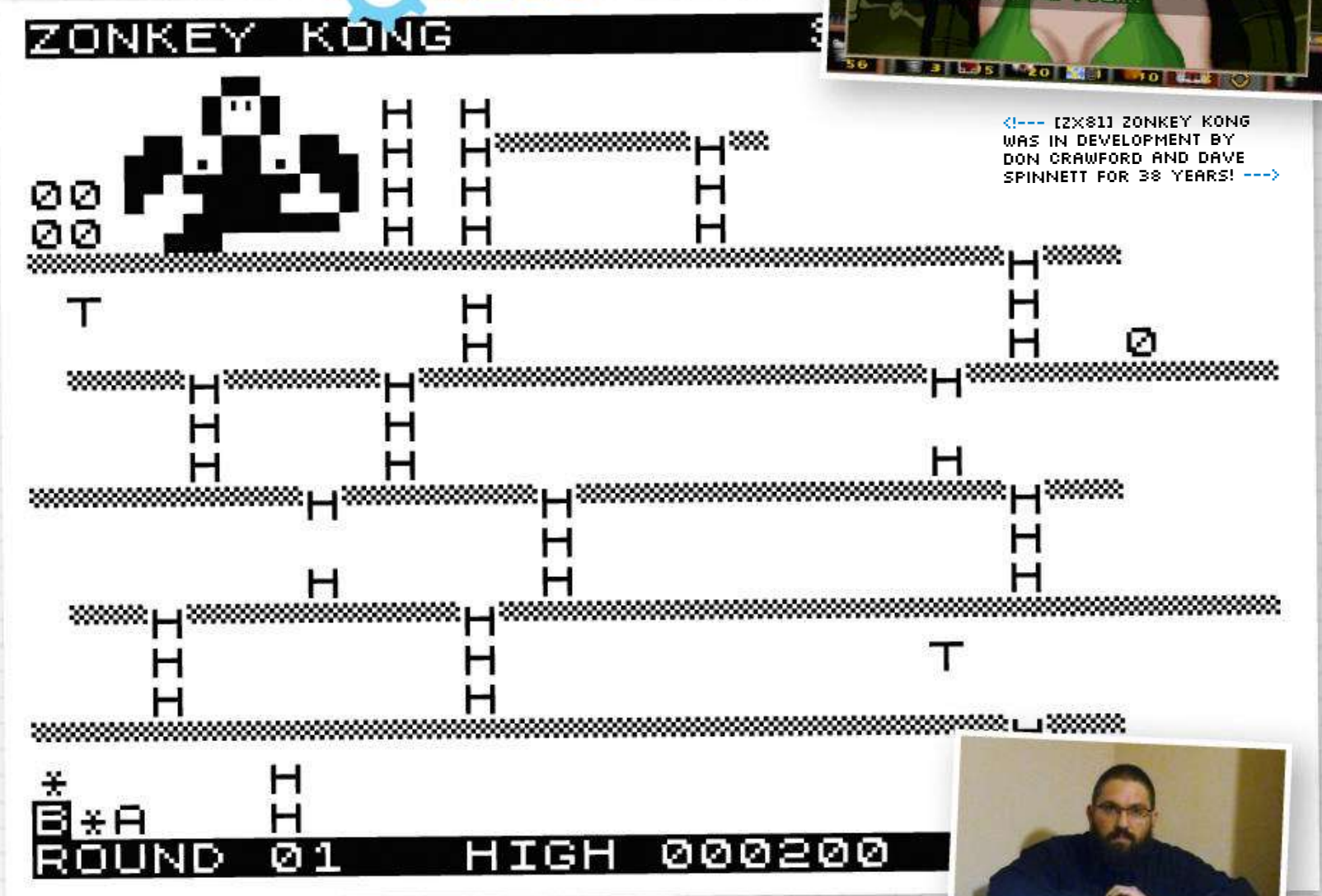
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

BLACKBIRD
I'M SHANA, YOUR GLAMOROUS HOST FOR THE 2021 COMP.SYS.SINCLAIR CRAP GAMES COMPETITION AWARDS CEREMONY. ON WITH THE SHOW!
1. A WINNER IS YOU...?

<!--- [ZX81] ZONKEY KONG WAS IN DEVELOPMENT BY DON CRAWFORD AND DAVE SPINNETT FOR 38 YEARS! --->



<INTRO> WE'VE ANOTHER VARIED SELECTION OF GAMES TO CHECK OUT THIS MONTH, INCLUDING TINY DUNGEONS AND PUZZLE BOBBLE. OUR MAIN FEATURE REVIEWS THE COMP.SYS.SINCLAIR CRAP GAME COMPETITION 2021, IN THE COMPANY OF ITS HOST JIM WATERMAN. WE ALSO TALK TO AMIGA CODER GRAEME COWIE AS HE SHOWS US HIS KUNG-FU SKILLS, AND IF YOU'RE A PLATFORM FAN, CHECK OUT THE GAMES MENTIONED IN NEWS BYTES. MAKE SURE YOU TUNE IN NEXT MONTH FOR SOME FRESH AMIGA JAM... </INTRO>

60 IF INKEY$ ="" THEN GO TO 40
70 BORDER 0
75 CLS
80 PRINT "You are standing by an open grave."
90 PRINT : PRINT : PRINT "Do you want a sandwiche?"
100 PRINT " 1) Yes."
110 PRINT " 2) No."
120 LET i$= INKEY$
130 IF i$ <> "1" AND i$ <> "2" THEN GO TO 120
135 CLS
140 BEEP 2,18: BORDER 2
150 PRINT "You have been hit over the head with a shovel."
160 BEEP 2,24
170 PRINT AT 10,9; INK 2; BRIGHT 1;"YOU ARE DEAD"
180 PAUSE 100
190 GO TO 10
+3 BASIC

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] LUNY'S PSYCHO 3 CRASHES OFTEN, LETTING YOU HAVE A LOOK AT THE BASIC LISTING...--->

I AM ON MY RAFT, DRIFTING ON THE SEA. TO THE EAST LIES MY DESTINATION, THE WEST COAST OF SOUTH AMERICA. I SEE: SHIP
APPROACHING
EXITS: NORTH, EAST, SOUTH, WEST.

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] RING OF THE INKA (SIR CLIVE EDITION) WAS 'UNLOCKED' AFTER 50 COMPETITION ENTRIES ARRIVED. WHAT A NICE BONUS. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

SPECTRUM SHENANIGANS

<INTRO> JIM WATERMAN HOSTED THE COMP.SYS.SINCLAIR CRAP GAME COMPETITION 2021 AND LOOKS BACK AT THE MEMORABLE ENTRIES </INTRO>

<BODY> **Jim's Spectrum history dates to the ZX81 he received for Christmas 1983, and he reconnected with the machines while procrastinating over his PhD.** He provided the first ZX80 entry for the CSSCGC in 2004 but drifted away again until 2017. "And then, 2020 happened, when suddenly there was a need to occupy myself without the option of doing so outside," Jim says.

Jim's fantastic 2020 entry *Corona Capers* meant he hosted the next edition. "Hosting next year's competition was (albeit jokingly) considered a punishment, but I considered it more of a badge of honour – I saw the potential of hosting the 2021 competition as a legitimate reason to stay alive, no matter what. March 2020 created the perfect storm of conditions under which I could write *Corona Capers* and give it everything I had. Iron Maiden provided the soundtrack, and after 11 days of solid programming, I had a game which I thought would give me a shot of being the Least Crap Game Of The Year."

Recent competitions have added optional challenges for participants, so what could Jim come up with? "All I could think of to start with was, 'I wonder if any programmer out there could find a clever use for VAL$ and INPUT AT?' and, 'Why not make a game based on a YouTube channel?'" The scoring system was based on *Rick Dangerous*. "I've owned rickdangerous.co.uk since 2000, the *Rick Dangerous* Resurrected fan site fell by the wayside. Rick was the hero, the Goolus were the initial antagonists, so those were the obvious candidates for 'plus' and 'minus' points."

Entries came in across a wide range of Sinclair machines. "It was definitely worth branching out beyond

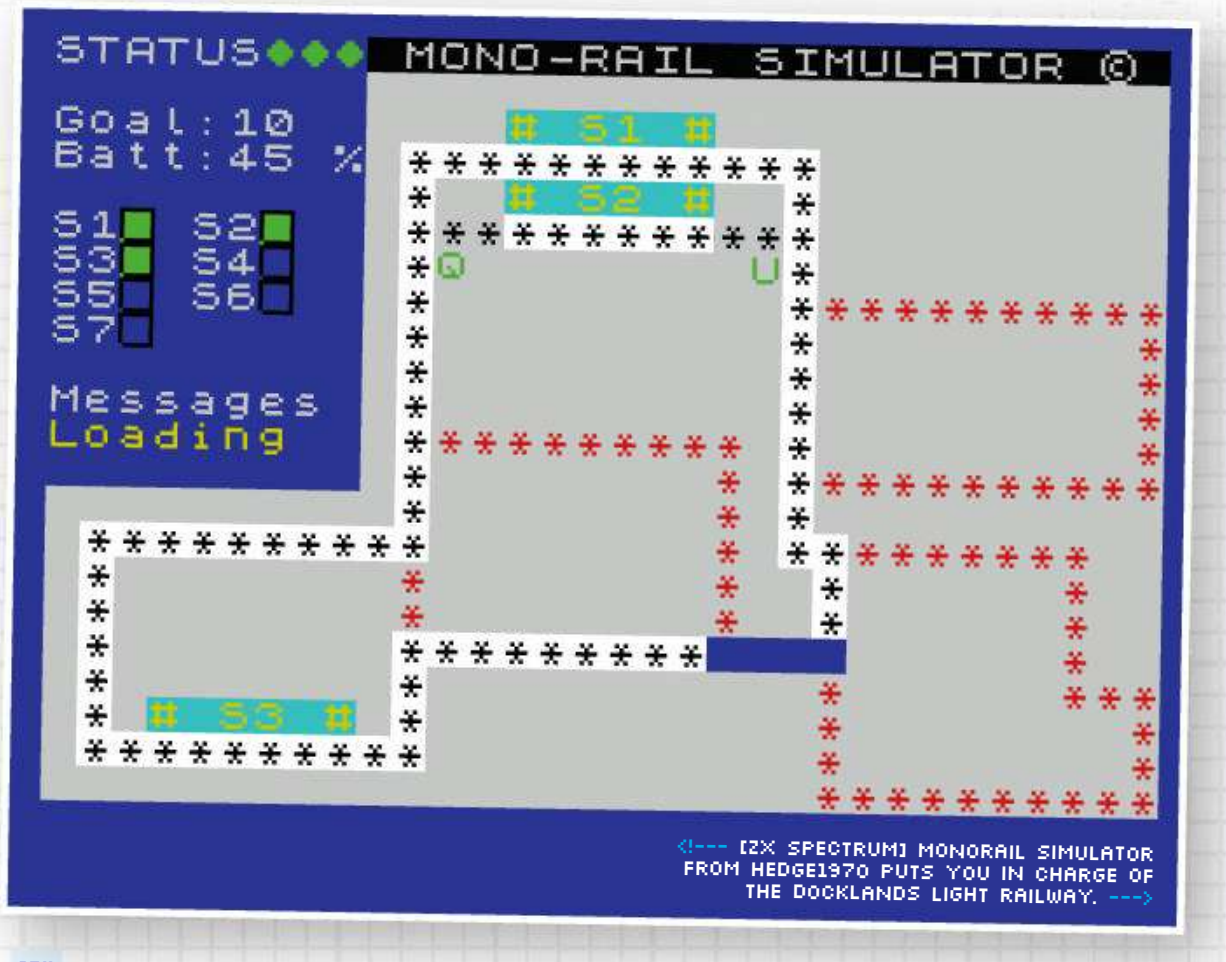
OUR SHOW HIGHLIGHTS

ZOMBIE DICE

<Andy Jenkinson's conversion of the Games Workshop dice game was the 'least crap' entry, earning him the honour of hosting CSSCGC 2022 – more info at bit.ly/csscgc2022/>

ASMR EYE EXAMINATION

<Paul E Collins was inspired by YouTuber Heather Feather, who appears in pixel form as your 'eyes' follow the light./>



<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] MONORAIL SIMULATOR FROM HEDGE1970 PUTS YOU IN CHARGE OF THE DOCKLANDS LIGHT RAILWAY. --->

the usual Spectrum-specific sites," says Jim. "That secured a record number of entries for ZX81 and the QL. Jamie Bradbury sent me two entries for the Z88, and John Connolly tackled the FORTH-speaking Jupiter Ace. I should have had an entry for the SAM Coupé that went 'missing in action,' and the prospect of a first-ever entry for the Lambda 8300 was dangled temptingly in front of me."

As for Jim's personal favourites, he says, "The most outstanding is John Connolly's *Ricky Gervais' Simon*. I set the Blue Challenge to write something in machine code for the 1K ZX80. But a game that's based entirely on repeating a pattern of sounds, on a supposedly-silent ZX80, in one kilobyte? And not just any old sound, but a PCM sample of Ricky Gervais' raucous laugh? It shouldn't be possible, even at the diabolically low bitrate required. Witchcraft. The other entry I'd single out is Enrique Pimpinela Santos' *Dragon Tale*, which was a demo for a *Dragon Ball Z*-style RPG that was never finished because there wasn't enough memory. The completed game would have trounced everything in its path."

Jim develops his own games in emulation. "I know there are going to be shrieks of outrage from some – when the Next arrives, though, I'll write programs on that." He's already working on his entries for 2022. "If I complete every project I've got planned, I'll be sending 17 entries. I've also committed to writing something approaching the scale of *Corona Capers* for the Spectrum's 40th birthday in April." </BODY>

<!--- [AMSTRAD CPC] COLLECT ALL THE HEARTS TO CONTINUE MORITZ'S JOURNEY ON THE AUTOBAHN. --->

NEWSBYTES

<INTRO> YOUR SNACK-SIZED NEWS ITEMS </INTRO>

<BODY> **<ICON64 (Trevor Storey & Stuart Collier) have the official blessing to make *Impossible Mission 3*.** A few rights needed to be sorted out with BMG but it's now back on track. />

<Spectrum programmer Paul Griffiths is preparing a Kickstarter campaign to bring *Joe Blade 4* to Spectrum Next. We're quite excited. />

<Marking the Sega Saturn's 27th anniversary, SegaXtreme forum hosted its annual coding competition. Visit bit.ly/saturn27 for Emerald Nova Games' round-up and links. />

<Bytemanics ran the 2022 ZX Spectrum BASIC coding competition, for pure and compiled BASIC. The winners received a ZXUno+ computer with VGA add-on. See bit.ly/zxbasic2022 for more info. />

<*RESET64* magazine launched the 2022 C64 Craptastic Game Competition, fitting a game into just 4K. 'Craptastic' means games that are funny and unusual, rather than bad. You can see them all at bit.ly/craptastic2022 />

<RESET has released Derek's VIC-20 conversion of the Sega/Gremlin arcade game *Deep Scan*. It is available at bit.ly/deepscan-vic and requires 35K memory expansion. />

<Sloanysoft is back with ZX Spectrum platformer *The Man With The Golden Joystick*, featuring Twitch streamer RetroHitch. Go to bit.ly/sloany3 for the free download – donations to videogame mental health charity Safe In Our World are appreciated. Phoenix Ware will donate profits from the tape version to the charity. Pere Serat has already converted *Golden Joystick* to Dragon/TRS-80 Coco, while *Forward To The Past* reached the Acorn Atom thanks to Kees van Oss. />

<Sintech has physical copies of tough platformer *Moritz On The Autobahn* from Sebastian Braunert available now, on ZX Spectrum cassette and Amstrad CPC disk. Head to bit.ly/moritz_auto to order, with *Moritz The Striker* also available. />

<Soren Trautner Madsen revealed *Awesome Slam Siblings* for the C64, his take on *Super Smash Bros.* Head to bit.ly/slamc64 for the video trailer. />

<INTRO>WE REALLY ENJOYED THESE</INTRO>

AATFTECFZES

<Lee Prince's *Advanced Adding A TXT File To An EPROM Card For A Z88 Emulator Simulator* ran away with the competition, thanks to generating multiple errors. />

MR DON'T

<Dave Hughes' game looks pretty simple, movement is in character blocks, and it doesn't have all the features of *Mr Do!* – but this is still fun for a 'crap' game. />

GENESIS 1:28

<John Connolly (host in 2020, born in 2002) mixed Bible quotes and mathematics in FORTH for the Jupiter Ace (born in 1982). Get it wrong and you face an ANGRY GOD. />

CHAMPION CODER

GRAEME COWIE (MCGEEZER)

<INTRO> GRAEME COWIE TALKS ABOUT HIS RECENT AMIGA GAMES AND NEW PROJECT DEVIL'S TEMPLE </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: ENGLAND WEBSITE: MCGEEZER.ITCH.IO FORMAT: AMIGA RECENTLY CODED: RYGAR AGA, TURBO SPRINT AGA DEVELOPING: DEVIL'S TEMPLE – SON OF THE KUNG-FU MASTER/>

DO YOU DEVELOP ON AMIGA HARDWARE, OR VIA CROSS-DEVELOPMENT?

<I develop on a Windows 10 PC with Notepad++, VASM and WinUAE, but I do my general debugging using MonAM via WinUAE. Key tools are Paint.net (Windows) and PPaint (Amiga) for doing graphical stuff, and Promotion-ng and Tiled for tile map type stuff. />

<!--- GRAEME'S MCGEEZER NICKNAME STEMS FROM THE SHAMEN TRACK EBENEEZER GOODE. --->

ANY TIPS FOR SOMEONE THAT IS NEW TO AMIGA CODING?

<Look at the English Amiga Board and ask plenty of questions. Anyone wanting to code can join my Amiga Game Dev Discord channel where lots of the established developers hang out and are always willing to give advice. />

RYGAR IMPRESSED US. HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO MAKE IT SO ACCURATE?

<I was very familiar with the game. The rest was simply about using the Amiga hardware to the best of its abilities. I'm really pleased the entire game fits on one floppy, that really took some doing. />

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN MAKING TURBO SPRINT?

<The memory requirements drove me crazy. The screens are 512x384 with 8-bitplanes, as I use triple buffering that's 600kb of RAM before you've got any sprites, audio, or code. I keep all the assets in the game compressed until I need them to minimise loading times. />

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO REMAKE IREM'S ARCADE HIT KUNG-FU MASTER?

<It's another of those games that I loved in the arcades; I also love my martial arts movies. Someone was doing a port with Blitz Basic, but it never materialised, so I thought I'd have a go. When I coded *Santa Run*, I worked with TenShu who did the pixels, he saw that I was porting *Kung-Fu Master* and asked if he could improve the graphics. A couple of days later and I was blown away about how good his new graphics looked. I'm hoping for a *Devil's Temple* release around May time (all being well). />

WHAT UPCOMING PROJECTS DO YOU HAVE PLANNED?

<I want to do some tutorials on coding, but I'm keen on porting *Hotline Miami* as I have the blessing from the Dennaton Games guys. />

WILL YOU BE DOING MORE PHYSICAL COPIES OF YOUR GAMES?

<I enjoy doing limited runs, so I established Geezer Games (www.geezergames.co.uk) />

<!--- [AMIGA] PICKING UP A TIME BONUS IN THE EXCELLENT RYGAR AGA. --->

<!--- [AMIGA] INSIDE THE DEVIL'S TEMPLE IS INSPIRED BY IREM'S KUNG-FU MASTER. --->

DATA BURST

LLUM

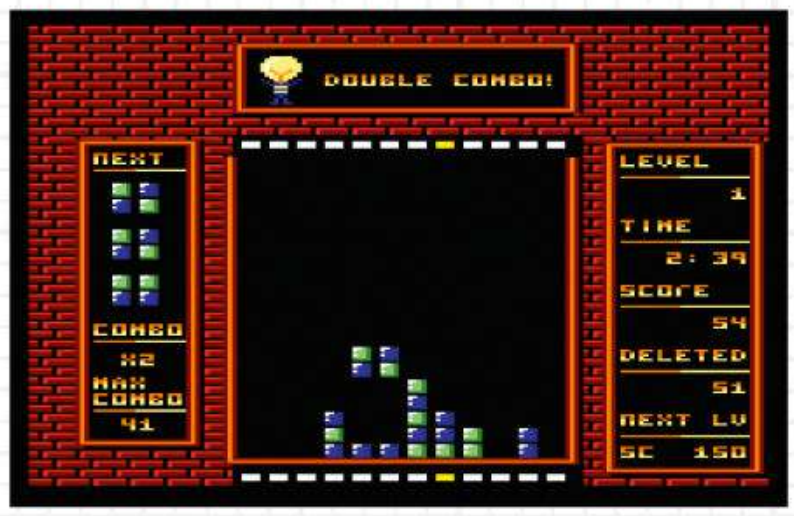
<INFO BY: 21 BLOQUES (IVAN AVILA) FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD VISIT: 21BLOQUES.ITCH.IO/LLUM />

<BODY> **This is a good attempt at remaking the PSP puzzle game *Lumines*, created with the 8BP library.** This extension adds useful graphics commands to Amstrad's BASIC, and Ivan has used it in previous games *Dogfight* and *8-Bit Wars* (his entry for CPC RetroDev 2021, see **RG** 230).

If you have not played the original by Tetsuya Mizuguchi of *Rez* fame, the aim is to move the falling pieces to create blocks of the same colour (at least 2x2 pieces in size) and clear them. The player can rotate the falling piece or drop it. However, completed blocks do not clear automatically – you must wait for the 'Timeline' to reach the right-hand side of the screen, and then any completed blocks will disappear. Unsupported blocks will fall, allowing the creation of combos for higher scores. But if the screen fills too high it is game over.

The Amstrad version comes with two different modes. Levels gives you a time limit to reach a score target, with the pace increasing as you go up through the levels. No Time removes the time limit and just lets you build for points. Presentation throughout is nice and colourful, with the option to redefine the keys welcome. There is a good title jingle and an in-game cover of the Rob Hubbard theme to *Action Biker*. It is easy to pick up and quite addictive. It's clever work from Ivan and an example of how the 8BP library can open up game development on the Amstrad. </BODY>

SCORE: 77%

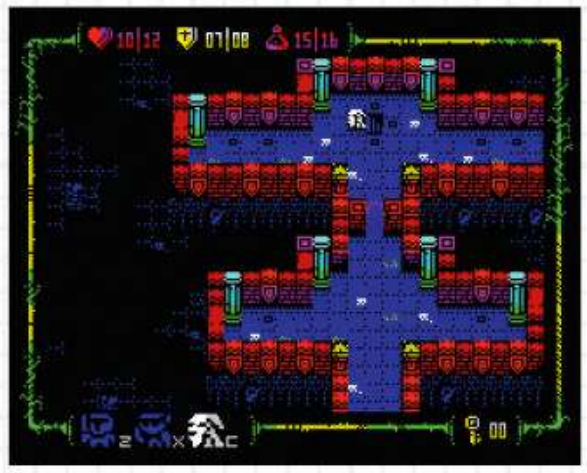


<!--- [AMSTRAD CPC] THE TIMELINE HAS REACHED THE RIGHT-HAND SIDE, CREATING A DOUBLE COMBO.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT



<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM 128] THE MIGHTY HERO HIDES BEHIND A PILLAR FROM TWO GREEN ENEMIES. --->

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM 128] THE WIZARD PREPARES TO DESCEND THE STAIRS TO THE NEXT LEVEL. --->

TINY DUNGEONS

<INFO BY: RETRO SOULS FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM 128K PRICE: NAME YOUR OWN PRICE VISIT: BIT.LY/TINYDUNGEONS />

<BODY> **An evil Necromancer holds the land of Twilight in fear, so three brave heroes set out into the ancient dungeons to put an end to his evil deeds.** Initially the Mighty Hero must rescue the other two characters; then they can be switched between at any time using Z,X and C. Reading the scrolls around the dungeon will give hints, while fighting enemies is done by running into them or firing Magic from a distance. Chests hold extra Energy, Magic and Shields, with switches to find and keys to unlock gates. Portals teleport you around the level and the final challenge is the Necromancer himself. This roguelike game has a superb graphic style, backed by atmospheric AY music and strong sound effects. The one drawback is there are only six levels to conquer, but it is still fun to replay. </BODY>

SCORE: 86%

<!--- [C64] PLAYER 2 IS RUNNING OUT OF ROOM AS PLAYER 1 AIMS A YELLOW BUBBLE. --->

<!--- [C64] THE ANIMATED BUBBLES AND FALLING MONSTERS HELP BRING THE SCREEN TO LIFE. --->

PUZZLE BOBBLE

<INFO BY: ACIED, HEND, NM156 FORMAT: C64 PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD WEBSITE: BIT.LY/BOBBLE64 />

<BODY> **The recent Amstrad adaptation earned 84% in RG 230, but this outshines it.** The Neo Geo-style attract sequence is sublime, and everything is accompanied by amazing reproductions of the original music and jingles. Sampled speech adds to the authenticity, while the popping bubbles look great. It's the gameplay where it really shines, with smooth controls and the difficulty curve of the original's levels. Best of all, the head-to-head two-player mode is included, which makes for some tremendous matches. The only niggle is the short loading between games to fit in all that presentation. It's otherwise really superb stuff. </BODY>

SCORE: 90%

Retro Gamer Swindler

PROCESSING

<INTRO> SONGBIRD PRODUCTIONS CONTINUES TO RELEASE NEW GAMES FOR OLD ATARI CONSOLES </INTRO>

<BODY> **March saw orders open for *8-Bit Slicks* on Lynx, which is limited to 250 units.** This overhead racer in the style of *Super Sprint* supports online play across 8-bit formats – thanks to the 8-Bit Unity framework – with more than 20 different tracks. The company's 8-Bit Hub hardware (sold separately) lets you play the game online with four Lynxes, adds extra ports and MicroSD storage. Meanwhile, the Jaguar title *Asteroite* is a science-fiction adventure platform game where you gain new skills as you explore, so it's good there is a handy save game facility.

It is the small but perfectly formed shoot-'em-up *MicroVaders* for Lynx that is interesting us, which is due for release towards the end of 2022. Songbird founder Carl Forhan explains, "It was actually a hidden extra in the Lynx game *Lexis*, but the hidden version has no sound, no music, simple graphics and extreme difficulty." Carl is working without any source code to reverse-engineer the game, and pixel artist anderlex is improving the graphics for a separate cartridge release. "I am adding new features including power-ups, pixel explosion effects, better graphics, sprite scaling, music, sound effects, and more," says Carl. A preview video is available at bit.ly/microvaders and the latest developments are at songbird-productions.com/category/news/ </BODY>

<!--- [LYNX] A SWIRLING ENEMY FORMATION REMINISCENT OF GALAGA AND A POWER-UP DESCENDING IN MICROVADERS. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

» [ZX Spectrum] The loading screen for *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* terrified young Tim. To be fair, that image would scare anyone.

FIGHTING FRENZY

The team reminisce about one-on-one fighting games

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

The recent announcement of *Street Fighter VI* has had the team chatting about one-on-one brawlers. Darran, Nick and Tim love a good brawler so we've decided to revisit the popular genre and discuss some of our favourite games and franchises.

DARRAN
What's the first one-on-one fighter you can recall playing? Mine was *Karate Champ*.

TIM
The Way Of The Exploding Fist. The loading screen used to scare the crap out of me.

NICK
Mine would have been *RealSports Boxing* for the Atari 2600. I love the way the boxers' heads snap back when they get punched in the face.

DARRAN
What is it that everyone likes about the genre then?

NICK
I mentioned this during a My Retro Life not too long ago, but I have a strong interest in martial arts as my dad is a karate instructor, and I really enjoy competing with other players.

DARRAN
I like the competitive side too, Nick. I also like the depth that many fighters have. They remind me of shmups in that many seem simple on the surface, but if you look deeper you'll find plenty of satisfying game mechanics. Is there anything particularly complex you enjoy?

NICK
The *Guilty Gear* series can be a bit daunting because there are a lot of different mechanics to wrap your head around, but the games look phenomenal and are awesome to play when you have an opponent of a similar skill level.

TIM
I used to really enjoy the *Tekken* series, starting with *Tekken 2*. I'd go over the moves lists printed in magazines and then try to perform them all in the game.

DARRAN
I used to enjoy the *Blazblue* series. I remember importing the first on PS3 and getting absolutely owned by characters. So what was the first fighting game to really take your breath away? *Street Fighter II*, surely?

> "Barbarian was great fun – lopping heads off for the wee goblin to kick"
> **TIM EMPEY**

TIM
Yep, *Street Fighter II*. I saw it in an arcade in Weston-Super-Mare on a school trip. I couldn't believe what I was looking at. Six buttons?! Quite a few characters?! I picked Blanka and mashed on punch.

NICK
I'm going to sound like a heretic, but it was *Mortal Kombat* for me. I only ever got to go to arcades on holiday at that point, and my dad had a Mega Drive, so those factors played a big part in that.

DARRAN
I bet you always used Raiden as well, Nick.

NICK
I'm captain default, so I always used Liu Kang!

DARRAN
Street Fighter II impressed me in arcades, but the two standout releases for me at home were *IK+* and *Barbarian*. *IK+* due to the third fighter and 'blink and you'll miss it' background effects, while *Barbarian* was great because I'd never played something so gory on my CPC.

TIM
I really liked the ball deflecting stage on *IK+*, I got quite good at that. And of course pressing 'T' on the keyboard in the middle of a match.

NICK
I like *IK+* a good deal. Actually, when I was a teenager I was on a coach trip to Germany and I forgot to bring a handheld, so I was intensely jealous of the man in front of me who had *IK+* on his Game Boy Advance.

TIM
Barbarian was great fun –

» [C64] The only thing better than decapitating someone in *Barbarian* was seeing what happened to the severed head afterwards.

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RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

lopping heads off for the wee goblin to kick. Did you play *Barbarian II*? I liked it but never got very far through it.

NICK
I've got *Barbarian II* but likewise, never got too far into it. I also never clocked that it was Wolf from *Gladiators* on the front cover until years later.

DARRAN
I realised it was Wolf and I absolutely recognised Maria Whittaker. I liked *Barbarian II*, but it lacked the finesse of the original. Speaking of finesse, what did everyone think of Daigo's awesome *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* parrying?

NICK
That was amazing, I remember it coming up in a forum topic and being blown away. I went and grabbed *Street Fighter III* for my Dreamcast pretty much solely off the back of that video.

TIM
The old Evo Moment #37? I saw that and was also blown away, so it was great that the *Anniversary Collection* came out around the same time on Xbox. It really sparked a whole lot of *Street Fighter III* matches in the office – we even had a league.

DARRAN
I remember that, Tim. I remember practising with Elena, until I realised that Hugo was a far better character for me thanks to unleashing the Darran Jones Factor™.

NICK
The stick spins, the buttons get hit, and nobody knows if Hugo will do a jumping strike or a powerful grab – not even Darran. This is the power of the Darran Jones Factor™.

DARRAN
Lol. It's funny because it's true.

NICK
Which 3D fighters do you guys prefer? My love for Virtua Fighter is well documented, but I've been streaming *Dead Or Alive 6* and *Tekken 7* and have been having a good time with both.

» [Xbox 360] Darran enjoys the backgrounds and the costume changes of the *Dead Or Alive* series.

DARRAN
To be honest, the only 3D fighting series I enjoy is *Dead Or Alive*. I've always liked the destructive environments and I love the sheer amount of unlockable costumes in them. Plus there's a stage where you can kick a dinosaur in the face.

TIM
I've played *Tekken* more than *Virtua Fighter*. I had good times with *Bloody Roar*, and not such good times with *Toshinden*.

DARRAN
I don't think I've ever played a *Bloody Roar* game. Are they good? I bet it's not as good as *Soulcalibur* on Dreamcast.

NICK
I like them, the animal transformations are a pretty good gimmick. They're not as good as *Soulcalibur*, mind.

TIM
Soulcalibur is better, but you can turn into animals in *Bloody Roar*. Jin Long was a beast.

NICK
Pun intended?

TIM
Damn right.

» [Arcade] Daigo's amazing string of parries is arguably one of Evo's greatest ever moments. It still impresses us today.

» [C64] In case you didn't know, this is what happens when you press the 'T' button in *IK+*.

» [PlayStation] Tim enjoys the *Tekken* series and has a particular affinity for *Tekken 2*.

A HISTORY OF ULTRA VIOLENCE

Readers reveal their favourite fighting games

Burned Retinas
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution. I believe it's the most complete game in the series.

Andy Endean
IK+. So much fun, and the background details and trouser drops are the icing on the cake.

Alastair Omand
Virtua Fighter 2. It is probably my most played Saturn game. There is something that's just so magical about the music, stages and different characters.

Generic Dude
Yie Ar Kung-Fu. The bright colour palette and loud sound effects drew me to it as a kid. I thought it was so cool how each enemy had a different style/weapon.

Stadium ARTs
Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike. It is peak *Street Fighter*. A game of flow states, precision and skill.

The Old Net
Marvel Vs Capcom because of the characters, the tag teaming and the vivid special effects!

Sakura Hoshi
Street Fighter III: 2nd Impact. This was the game I learned how to play in arcades and built up a lot of my fundamental skill in.

DayCryptic
Too many to count, but *Tekken 3* was the one I was most excited for back in the day. *Tekken 2* got me into the series, and *Tekken 3* kept me with it to today onwards.

ACO
Soulcalibur II for the GameCube. Link fighting samurai, pirate, and demons.

Rick Lindeman
SNK Vs Capcom: The Match Of The Millennium on the Neo Geo Pocket. It oozes character and brings fighting games back to the essence.

Shiryu
The purity of *The Way of the Exploding Fist* on ZX Spectrum beckons, but I will go with *Soulcalibur II* on the GameCube. Sure, everyone has weapons but it still counts, right? [It counts - Ed]

Ben Wilson
Street Fighter Alpha 3. Sizeable roster, lots of variety in fighting styles, pinpoint controls.

Martin
Capcom Vs SNK because it is the perfect mix of familiarity, stunning gameplay, great art direction and incredible audio presentation.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

GAME GEAR KIOSK

"I just couldn't say no to this when given the chance by my wife for my 30th birthday. It's something unique that I know few collectors own."

PAID: £500

BATMAN RETURNS MEGA-CD POSTER

"I absolutely love this piece and it really adds some variety to the collection while livening up the walls."

PAID: £100

GAME GEAR RARITIES

"Not one title but a small collection. I'm proud of having found these as most of them now command big prices."

PAID: A FORTUNE

BIO

NAME:
Jonathan McNeill

LOCATION:
North Devon, UK

FAVOURITE GAME:
Sensible Soccer

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Mega Drive

COLLECTION WORTH:
£40,000+

ON IT LIKE SONIC

Jonathan McNeill has an enviable collection of Sega games

Remember the old Sega slogan, "To be this good takes AGES"? Of course you do and, as if to prove that is true, we turn our attention to Jonathan McNeill who has spent seven years amassing a truly impressive PAL collection that is primarily centred around Sega's past glories.

"My love of gaming and collecting started from a very early age when I received *Aladdin* and *The Lion King* for the Mega Drive for my sixth birthday," he tells us. "Then, about seven years ago, I started to properly take the collecting seriously and expanded my small set of Mega Drive games from a meagre 20 titles to 5 short of 400."

Not content with amassing titles for Sega's amazing 16-bit console, Jonathan began to look further afield. "I would just buy anything I thought was interesting when I was out with friends," he continues. "I'd go to the local retro stores or CEX but I found things were getting out of hand with lots of games across many systems. It was at this point that I wondered if I could complete a whole set and decided to only search for Dreamcast because it was a system that had really started to grow on me."

It took him seven years to collect every commercially-released PAL Dreamcast game (216 of them) and these are proudly displayed in an Ikea Billy Bookcase. "Those bookcases have been very useful to me because they're great for displaying," he says. The set takes pride of place in a dedicated gaming room that has taken him two years to create. "But, like any games room, it's not finished. I still have one wall I'd like to develop to better display the rarer of my games," he admits.

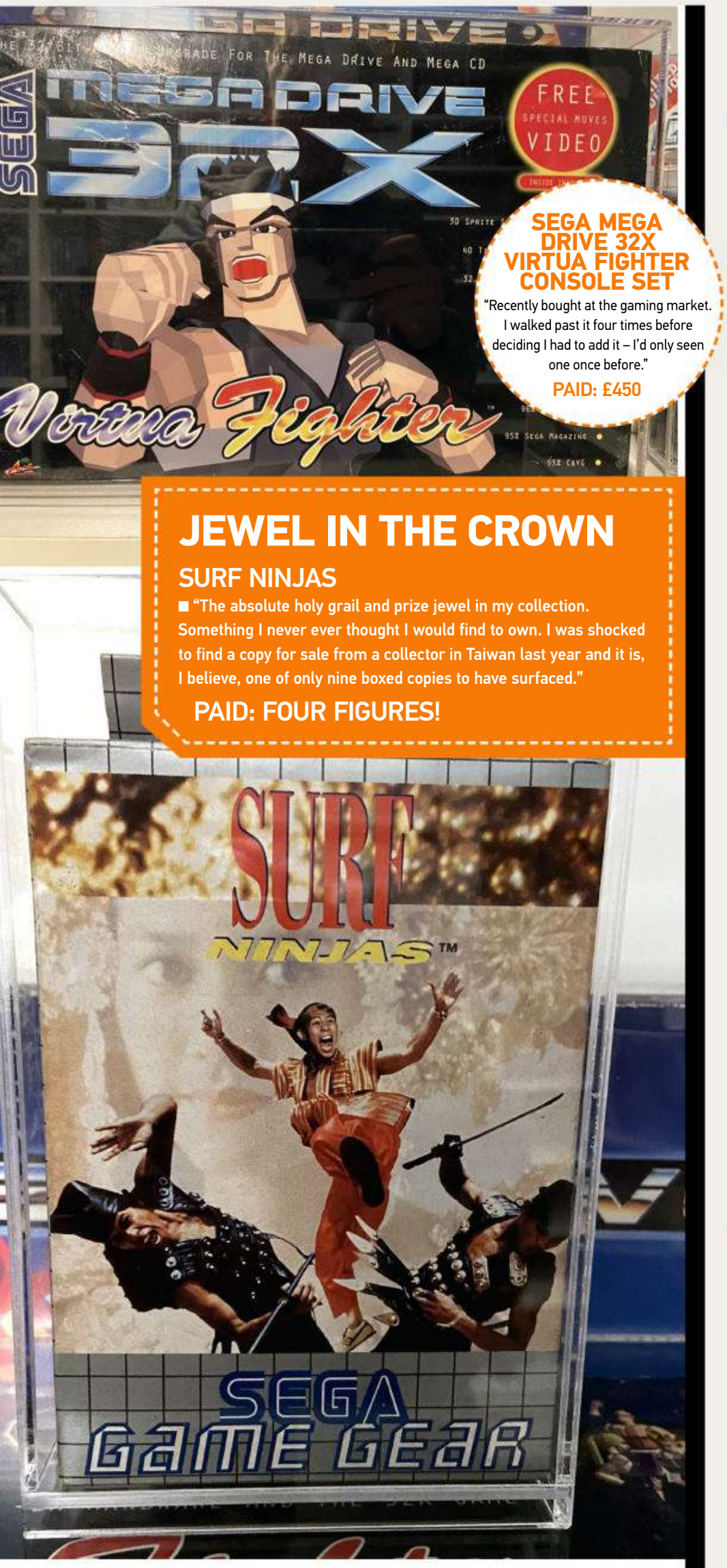
Jonathan has recently been focussed on trying to collect every Mega-CD game – and he's only one game away from a full PAL set (needing only *Syndicate*). "I've been trying to complete it with the spine cards which is very tricky because a lot were thrown out by people back in the day – after all, who wants to keep a small piece of cardboard?" he says. He's also one game short of a full set of Game Gear games, needing just *Power Drive*, but he's managed to bag all 269 PAL Master System titles. "I'm three-quarters of the way towards a Mega Drive collection and a third of the way through PS2 but I certainly don't intend to finish that one off!"

One thing's for sure, he's sticking with a Nineties' flavour, by and large. "Growing up in that decade has certainly influenced my collection and it's also why I'm so Sega-focussed," he continues. "My brother, who is much older than me, had the Spectrum and the Eighties stuff but that never grabbed me as much as Sega and the PlayStation 1 and 2 eras." But does he advise people to follow in his footsteps?

"It's a tricky one to answer because a lot depends on how far you're prepared to stretch your pockets," he says. "Certainly if I was starting now, I wouldn't dream of starting from scratch. I just simply couldn't afford to do it. But it's still very achievable to put together a nice collection of titles and there are still some great games out there at very affordable prices. It's not all doom and gloom."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com



SEGA MEGA DRIVE 32X VIRTUA FIGHTER CONSOLE SET

"Recently bought at the gaming market. I walked past it four times before deciding I had to add it – I'd only seen one once before."

PAID: £450

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SURF NINJAS

■ "The absolute holy grail and prize jewel in my collection. Something I never ever thought I would find to own. I was shocked to find a copy for sale from a collector in Taiwan last year and it is, I believe, one of only nine boxed copies to have surfaced."

PAID: FOUR FIGURES!

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

ZX SPECTRUM

It's quite common to find the ZX Spectrum selling for about **£40** – a quid for every year it's been around! But the price will obviously depend on the condition of the computer, with boxed and tested versions shifting for about **£70** and those sold for parts being flogged for about **£15.** You can often find a +2 model for about **£50.**

GUARDIAN HEROES

This 2D side-scrolling Saturn beat-'em-up will generally set you back at least **£90** for a complete PAL version. Just be wary of reproductions. The Japanese NTSC edition starts from **£30** (although there's a lot of text), while the US version hits **£200.**

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

Fancy diving in with an original copy of this action adventure for the Mega Drive? Then you should be able to pick up a PAL copy in very good condition for **£5** or so complete.

SNK VS CAPCOM: THE MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM

An original mint copy of this Neo Geo Pocket Color game sold on everyone's favourite auction house website for **£77.** If you only want the cart, expect to pay at least **£20.**

SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR

You can grab this PC game in its original big box with everything inside for about **£10.** If you want the re-release under the Sold Out label, it will only cost you a couple of quid.

THE TERMINATOR

You won't be blasting a massive hole in your pocket with this PAL Mega Drive game. You can pick it up from around **£10** – check the manual is included.

KUNG-FU MASTER

Looking for the Amstrad CPC edition of *Kung-Fu Master* published by US Gold that Darran mentioned this issue? Only beat yourself up if you pay more than **£7** for it.

THE SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN

The PS2 editions of this game sell for **£15** or so (knock a fiver off for the Platinum version). The GameCube edition sells for more than **£20,** while the Xbox edition rarely hits **£25.**

HOW MUCH?!

SILENT HILL 2

Ordinarily, you can bag yourself a copy of this special edition of Konami's game for as little as **£40** so we were shocked and a little scared to see that a sealed copy fetched **£1,250** on eBay recently as a Buy It Now.

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

MY RETRO SHED

Where Darran works, rests and plays

Over the years I've posted various pictures of my games room on Twitter or Facebook and friends and readers have inevitably asked questions about it. While I briefly mentioned my shed in issue 200, this feels like a good opportunity to discuss it in a little more depth, as quite a few readers have been asking me about it online. I thought it made sense to reply here, just in case anyone is thinking of building anything similar in the future.

I ended up buying a shed because my interest in collecting was taking over the house and Melanie was at her wits' end. I've always had a healthy interest in collecting and back in 2013 I was buying retro games, modern games, blu-rays and board games, which take up a tremendous amount of space. Everything came to a head one night when Mel said that I had to sort my crap out because she was "sick of living in a house that looks like it belongs to the guy from *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*".

Needless to say we started looking at solutions to "all your shit" as Melanie called my stuff and I was given a list of options including, moving to a new place with more rooms, getting a multi-story extension or selling all my stuff. The first two options were simply too expensive to even consider and Mel had past form for skipping my stuff when I wasn't looking (RIP Amstrad CPC) so I came up with an alternative option – build a gaming shed.

While building anything like this would require a fair amount of research the retro gaming gods were smiling on me and I already knew exactly what to do. One of Mel's friends had a husband who was also planning to create his own shed – although it was going to be a more sensible workshop – and he'd already done lots of research and decided that S&N Timber was the best place in Dorset. He's an architect by trade, so his recommendation was more than good enough for me, so we visited S&N and explained exactly what I needed.

It wasn't long before the shed was being constructed and it was largely done in a few days. The longest amount of time was waiting for the cement base I built with Mel's dad and brother to be completed, as it needed to dry. The whole process was: base, construction, electrics (which Mel's dad also kindly did for us), insulation and finally the inside walls and windows were put in. On the subject of insulation, while I have it, it's not quite as good as it could be and the last couple of winters have been cold. Brick would be much better, but one of the benefits of a wooden construction is that it's classed as a collapsible structure so you don't have to worry about anywhere near as many planning permissions (if any).

> "It's become a safe haven for me, a place where I can relax"
> **DARRAN JONES**

Over the past nine years my shed's contents have changed considerably, and I've often moved things around so I can maximise the amount of space I have. One thing that hasn't changed though is that it's been housing my retro collection for the entire time, along with my numerous board games and a significant amount of Lego that I began collecting back in 2017. It's become a safe haven for me, a place where I can relax after a long day at work, a place where I can enjoy games with my girls and it's proven to be a great way to keep our friends' kids entertained whenever they visit.

Nowadays though, my shed has also doubled up as a place of work and I had to make a few sacrifices and sell off a few things so I'd have space for all the extra work gear I needed to have access to. I also needed to make space for our huge library of books which would have probably been lost when our office closed down in 2020. Initially it was hard to switch off from work (something I'm sure many who have had to work from home have also had to adjust to in recent times) but I soon managed to adjust to the new working arrangements.

So before I wrap things up I'll answer the numerous questions I'm often asked about my shed. Cost-wise we paid around £3,500 for all the materials, but that was in 2013 and I shudder to think what all that wood would cost today. The electric work was done for free and the concrete base cost about £250 (and to answer another question I get, no, no one is buried under it). It has insulation in the walls, but I typically retreat to the house from November to March. (I do have a heater but with electricity costs rising it makes no sense to add to our bill when I could just move inside.)

I've had absolutely no issues with damp in all the time the shed has been standing, but one year I did have a woodlouse infestation (there were about 120 of the buggers in one of the corners which I cleared out with a dustpan and brush). In terms of security I have a five-lever mortice lock on the door and all the windows are similarly secured and everything is insured. Oh, and the answer to the question I'm asked the most? No it is definitely not a sauna, even though it might look like one.

SHED HIGHLIGHTS

THE THINGS IN MY SHED I LOVE

PUB FOOD
Since January I've started buying bags of Scampi Flavour Fries and Bacon Flavour Fries. I hang them on the wall and they look and taste great.

SONY PVM-2950QM
Yes the geometry is a little off but it's a magnificent beast of a monitor and my games look great on it.

READING MATERIAL
In addition to all the books we get sent to review I've got a near-complete collection of *N64 Magazine* and **Retro Gamer** to read.

HORSTACHIO
He's dusty as hell now, but I was given him when I visited Rare for the first time and I'll never ever get rid of him.

SEGA SATURN COLLECTION
I've got lots of games in my shed, but the Saturn gives me the most joy and I've been using it lots lately.

IT LOOKS LIKE A NORMAL SHED FROM THE OUTSIDE BUT INSIDE IT'S MY FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE.
WORKING FROM HOME AT LEAST ALLOWS ME TO BIRD-WATCH WHEN I'M NOT PROOFING.
THE HORSE ON THE RIGHT IS HORSTACHIO FROM VIVA PIÑATA, THE MASK ON THE LEFT IS FROM STAR TREK.

GAMING HAVENS

Readers tells us where they do their gaming

HERE'S THE VAST MAJORITY OF MY SEGA STUFF. I'M REALLY ENJOYING THE SATURN AND PLAY IT NIGHTLY.
THIS IS RETRO GAMER'S RESEARCH BOOKSHELF. IT USED TO BE IN OUR OFFICE, NOW IT'S IN MY SHED.
I LOVE SIMON BUTLER'S PIXEL ART AND WOULD HAVE MORE IF SPACE ALLOWED. VISIT DINOSAUR-PIE.CO.UK FOR MORE OF HIS STUFF.
I'M A HUGE FAN OF THE N64 AND BOUGHT MANY OF THESE GAMES AS LOCKDOWN STARTED. PRICES HAVE SOARED SINCE.
YES THEY ARE DELICIOUS, AND NO, YOU CAN'T HAVE ANY.
I BOUGHT THIS PVM JUST BEFORE LOCKDOWN AND HAVE STAYED IN TOUCH WITH ITS PREVIOUS OWNER EVER SINCE. HE'S A LOVELY CHAP.

bVork
In 2020, I cleared out and turned a storage room in my basement into a retro gaming room. It has a CRT HDTV on a stand that rolls out so I can have it directly face the couch. Consoles are stored in the cabinet when not in use. It is now my happy place.

Cubism
I have a man cave/converted garage as my study/games room. Even though I'm fortunate enough to have a room for myself in a busy household, there still never seems to be quite enough space for all my gaming stuff...

SpectrumNez
A little cubby hole under the stairs. I have to put my headphones on and sit there like a hunched-over, gaming goblin so I don't disturb my wife while she watches her 'programmes'. Sigh.

UniversalRetroBoss
My games garage is going through a massive overhaul. New games, new arcades, new consoles, new alcohol...

Vinny Mainolfi
I have a retro cupboard in the living room. My wife and daughter are incredibly understanding.

Simon Dueck
I had a man cave in the spare room but that's now a nursery due to our second child arriving in mid-April. I hope I like this child enough to bear the sacrifice I've made...

AndyH
I am lucky and have a whole room, but that is on the understanding my wife can fill the rest of the house with books. [Sounds like a fair compromise – Ed]

The-T-Word90
I've gradually taken over the dining room to a point where my daughter now calls it daddy's game room.

James Bradley
I have a spare room dedicated to retro. It's a dreamy place!

Cameron Phillips
We bought a new house two years ago and I converted the extra bedroom into a games room. My wife gets the actual living room to watch her TV in because "12 consoles below the TV is ridiculous" apparently. Secret to a happy marriage, let me tell you.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books

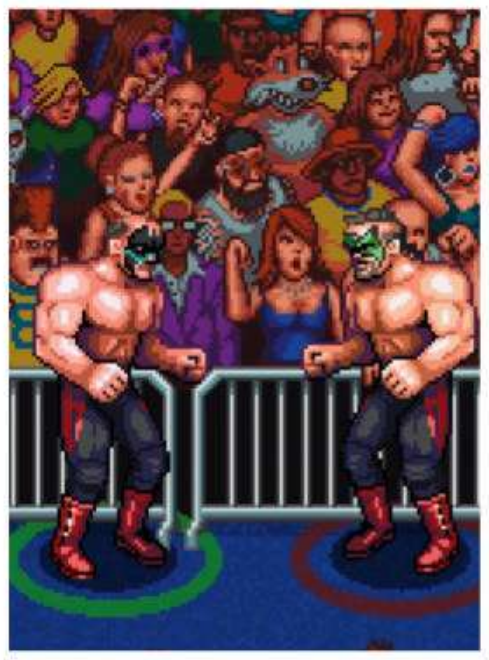
STAR LETTER

FEELING MUGGED

Dear Darran,
I'm a long-time reader of **Retro Gamer**. Many moons ago, I ordered a mug from an earlier issue that had images of sprites from retro games (see image below). It's been my favourite mug for the last decade or so, so I was gutted this week when my husband dropped it in the sink and it smashed! I thought I would email on the off-chance you had any spare mugs squirrelled away in the archive that I could purchase?
Warmest wishes,
Theo Raymond

Hi Theo, we're so sorry that your mug is broken. Sadly, we no longer have any for sale or any spares that we could send you. We're more than happy to send you a bookazine, though. Hopefully it will give you just as much enjoyment.

» Theo's mug, before the accident. We hope your new book gives you a similar amount of joy.



» [PC] Here's Christian appearing in the rather enjoyable *Retro Mania Wrestling*. Have you played it?

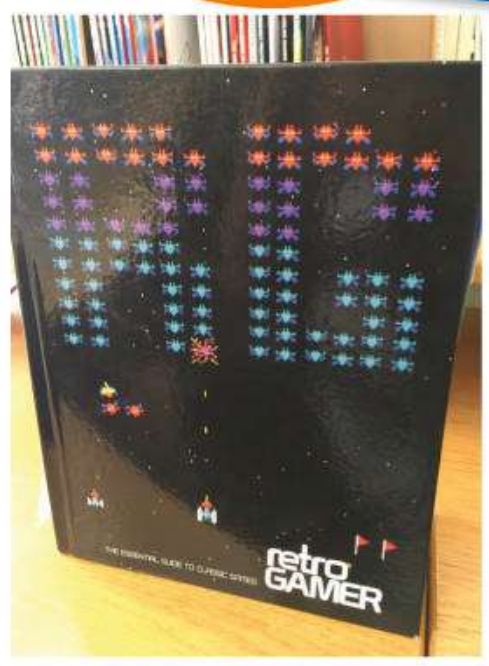
CAN I CAMEO?

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
I have a question for you. I'm going for the world record for most cameos in an indie game. So far, I have had about 20 creators put me in their videogames. I have been in a Switch game, an Xbox game and an Evercade game along with many more. I would love to have this mentioned in your magazine if possible, even if it's just a brief mention. If that is possible, I've included a few pictures of me that you can use. (In *Retro Mania Wrestling* I'm the character with red glasses and a black beard.)
Yours sincerely,
Christian Howard

That's a really cool idea, Christian. We've never known someone to ask to appear in a videogame before, so it's great to see so many developers agreeing to it. Some of the games you sent us look nice and retro as well. Good luck with your record attempt.

IN A BIND

Hi there, **Retro Gamer,**
I was wondering if you will be getting the **Retro Gamer** magazine binders back in stock? They've not been on the website for a long time now and my pile of magazines is getting unwanted attention from my wife!
Many thanks,
Ronnie Young



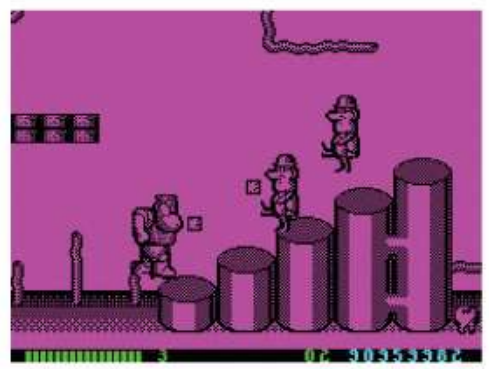
» Ronnie is looking forward to binders returning. We'll let you all know when they become available again.

Hi Ronnie, we've not heard any plans to bring them back yet, but we'll mention it in the magazine as soon as they are available to buy again.

LIFE OF BEN

Hi **Retro Gamer,**
I love your magazine. I was just curious if you have ever run any articles on the old *Monty Python* CD games that were released in the Nineties, and if you have any tips on how to play them today. By the way, we're about to publish a book on the 1982 *Pac-Man* cartoon series.
Regards,
Ben Ohmart

Thanks for writing in, Ben. The only *Monty Python* game we've covered was *Monty Python's Flying Circus* in issue 99. We can certainly take a look at the others, they seem very eclectic. The *Pac-Man* book sounds interesting, too.



» [ZX Spectrum] We've covered *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, but Ben would like to see more games covered.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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» [SNES] If you enjoyed our recent SNES feature like Rob did, we've got another one planned for the end of the year.

Once again a massive thank you for all of your hard work - your magazine brings a smile to many readers' faces and there cannot be a worthier job than that.
Take care,
Rob Brand

We're glad you liked the feature Rob and we're already planning to feature similar cover articles later in the year so look out for them. We can certainly look into the SVP chip, but it's not well-documented due to only one game being released for it. We'll do some digging and see what we can do.

PUSHING THE LIMITS

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
Thank you for your tremendous efforts each month in producing such a quality magazine. It is a terrific read and I look forward to the loud splat of the magazine hitting my doormat each month after it has been posted through my letterbox.

I loved your recent feature on 30 games that technically pushed the SNES. How about running this as a semi-regular feature across other platforms? It would make a lovely alternative to the usual top ten lists.

A lot has been written about the Super FX chip, but I'd love to see the SVP chip getting some more love. Were there ever plans for additional games beyond *Virtua Racing*? Did any of these get into a demo form? How does it stack up technically versus the Super FX?

ASTRO WARS

Hi **Retro Gamer,**
I was wondering if you'll be covering the Astro City Mini V when it's released later this year? I'm a massive fan of shoot-'em-ups and this looks like it's going to be an excellent companion to the Egret II Mini which I recently purchased. Playing these games on a vertical screen is the way it should be and I'm glad Sega has decided to give these games the platform they deserve. I'm all excited to play games like *Truxton 2* and *Armed Police Batrider* as I've never played them outside of the arcades before.
Yours faithfully,
Stephen Trott

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

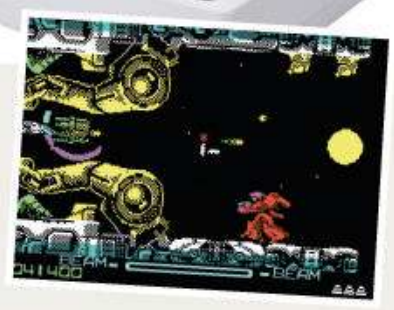
Elden Ring

Hype for FromSoftware's game is everywhere and it's been hard to ignore. While Andy and Nick have yet to play it, Tim has been sinking his time into it and says he's "got good and beaten it twice, nerr". Ste Pickford has also been enjoying it and has been keeping an incredible diary of his adventures on Twitter (look for @stepickford). His diary is so cool Darran started playing too.

You're not the only one looking forward to the Astro City Mini V Stephen, as Darran ordered one as soon as it appeared on Amazon's Japanese website. It's a great-looking system and hopefully the build quality will match the selection of games.

» We've ordered our systems already, so hopefully a review will arrive by the year's end.

Your say



» [ZX Spectrum] Bob Babe's stunning conversion of *R-Type* was a great reason to own a Spectrum.

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Spectrum-related memory?

Buildables
That Saturday feeling of going into a shop and browsing all the Firebird games and being able to afford them. Happy days.

Chad mcdad
Sitting with my brother exploring the universe in *Elite*, trading and battling our way to glory.

Retro Daz
I recently bought one for my 40th birthday as I missed out on one as a kid! I'm having a great time playing *The Trap Door*, *Cobra* and the weird speech of *Punchy*.

Shining Galoot
Playing *Transformers* and being amazed that you could actually transform. Also, wondering why the colour of the entire stage had to change depending on which character I picked.

Robin
Two-player *Target: Renegade* with my best mate, both on the rubber keyboard. Great times!

Michael White
Getting *Little Puff* from Codemasters for completing my white belt grade in karate.

Dave
The loading sounds of the games. All distinctive, like listening to a song, takes you right back to when you first heard it.

Super Jimtendo
I came here to write a hilarious gag about having a C64 but I'm fashionably late and the internet has already done me a service.

Stu Lek 52
The excitement of seeing, buying, then playing *Knight Lore* for the first time. Those big boxes looked fantastic.

Hairy Viking
Playing *Target: Renegade* with my brother, both laying on our fronts, staring at a black and white Ferguson telly as if it was the most comfortable thing in the world.

frank
Playing *R-Type* and *Batman* instead of revising for GCSEs over that part of the year. Great times!

Ken Harrison
A: Serve the public trust. B: Protect the innocent. C: Uphold the law. Playing *RoboCop*!

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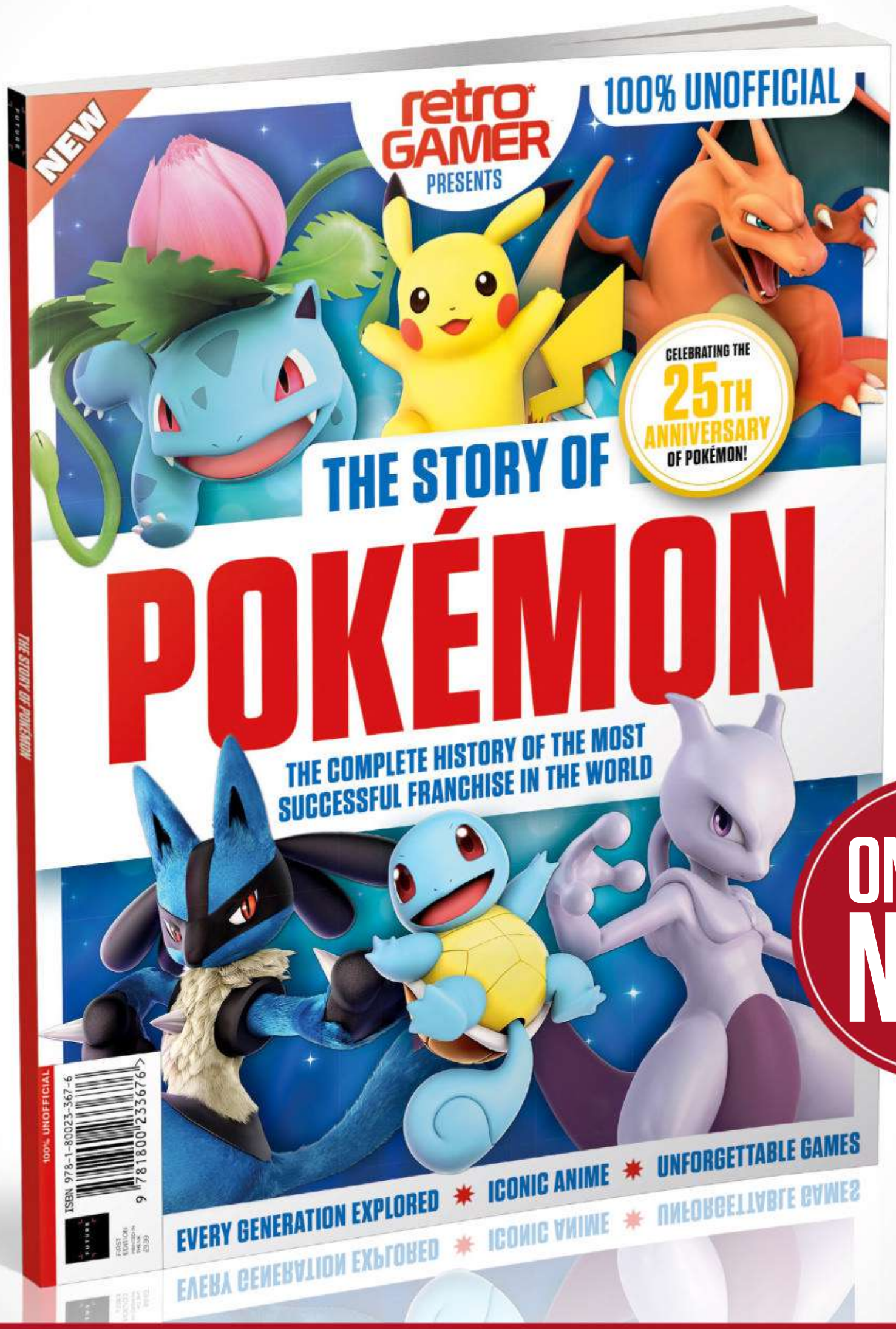
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Shadow The Hedgehog

"HEAVEN CAN'T SAVE US, HELL IS A JOKE"

» GAMECUBE » 2005 » SONIC TEAM

Boot Sonic out of his own series, and replace him with his moody rival. Suck out all of the bold colours, add some guns and vehicles, and make sure to get Powerman 5000 on the soundtrack. That formula could have made *Shadow The Hedgehog* a killer parody of the mid-Noughties trend for darker and edgier games, but it was just as sincere as *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within*, and at least eight times as absurd. I received *Shadow The Hedgehog* as a Christmas gift. Please don't pity me – despite all of the warning signs, I still had some lingering faith that Sonic Team could somehow make this preposterous premise work, and actually asked for it. [Lol - Ed]

The big gimmick in *Shadow The Hedgehog* was a morality system that allowed him to ally with Sonic and the people of Earth, or the invading Black Arms aliens. The game's stages were arranged in a branching path system, with ten different endings depending on your actions, and once you'd seen all of those there was a final true ending. I went for the most heroic route to start and soon found myself at Final Haunt. Did you know that activating the heroic ability, Chaos Control, flips switches for the dark mission? I didn't – and after 45 minutes of looping around the same stage and not understanding why I couldn't finish it, I gave up on the game.

Five years later, I'm finally in a stable house after moving around a lot, so I bring my Wii to the new place and all of my GameCube games come with me – and there's *Shadow The Hedgehog*. I could have just watched all the endings on YouTube at this point, but my mum had spent her hard-earned money so I could have this game. It would be downright rude not to play it properly. So I painstakingly worked through the game until I had earned all 11 of its endings. Not because I love Sonic, and not because I'm a masochist, but because I just can't casually dismiss a gift I've been given.

1/5
B
107
od job!

ENDGAME

GALERIANS

» When Rion gets a headache, you'd better watch out – if you get anywhere near him, you'll have a rather explosive headache of your own. Sensing that this might be a problem, he decides to pop to the pharmacy to try to get some paracetamol, as his current tactic of dosing up on the more serious stuff is proving to have some side effects. Let's see how he gets on...

01

» Rion and his girlfriend complete the perilous trip across town, having braved the horrors of the number 62 bus on the school run. The kind, dentally challenged woman named Dorothy at the pharmacy counter asks how she can help.

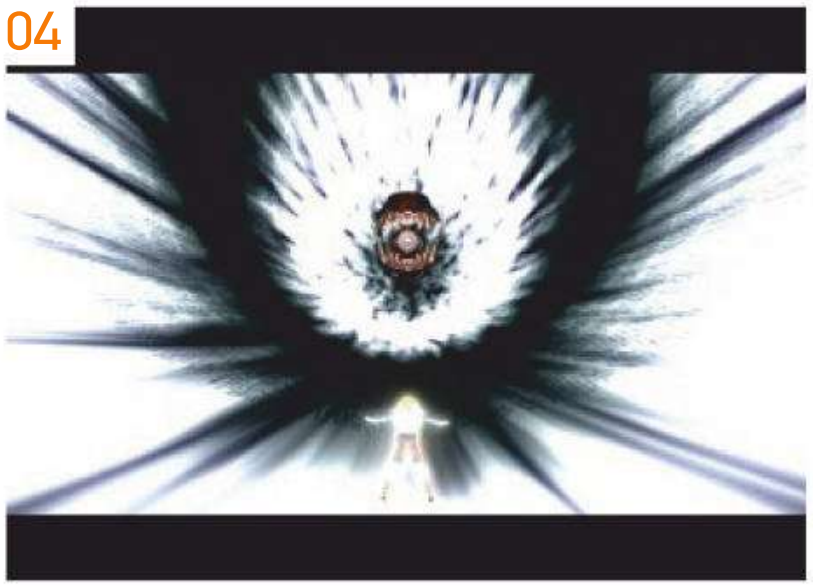
02

» "Mate, I've got a banging headache, I need to stock up on paracetamol," says Rion. "That's no problem, it'll be 39p a box," says Dorothy. "Do you want one box or two?" Rion decides that two is probably the right number.

03

» Suddenly, an important question comes to mind. "Can I still do contactless if it's less than a fiver?" Dorothy assures Rion that there's no problem with small transactions here. "Ah, great. Some places get funny about that."

04



» Unfortunately, Dorothy was misinformed. The pharmacy's card reader had a flaw – any transaction under a pound had a small but real chance of causing an explosion. Before another word can be uttered, a gigantic blast rips through the pharmacy, destroying both Dorothy and the supply of paracetamol.

05

» Rion's girlfriend is aghast at what she's seen. "You... we... what have we done? Are we murderers, Rion? *Are we murderers?*" As Rion looks over the wreckage of the pharmacy, headache still pounding, he has only one response. "Uh, dunno. Got a quid? I should probably try paying cash at the next place."

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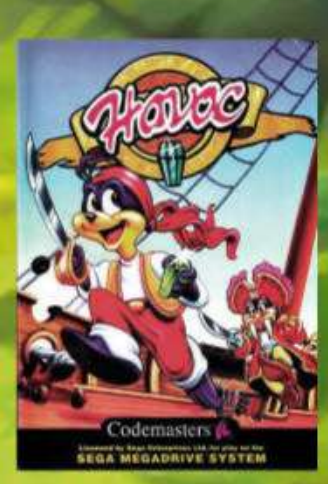

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